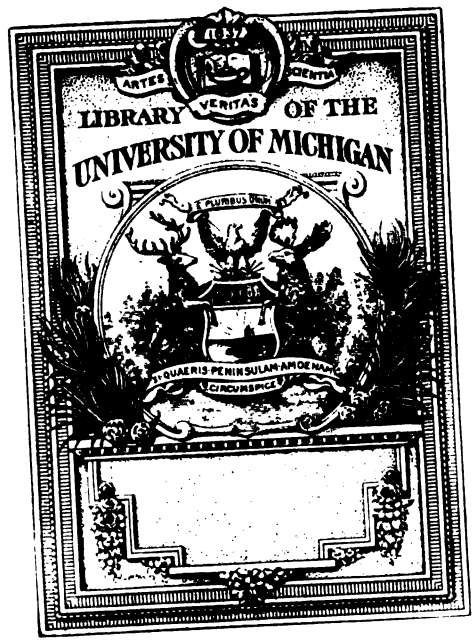
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The Wages *of* Sin

BY

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BOOK I.—MAN AND MAID.

'Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived.'—BISHOP BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

ONE September day towards sunset, when the world was younger by some fourteen or fifteen years than it is now, a small family party was gathered together in the long, narrow strip of turf and flower-garden known as the bowling-green, that lies under the old wing of Slerracombe House.

The individuals composing this party were not, with one exception, very remarkable at first sight. A lady of about five-and-forty, seated in a low wicker chair, near a tea table placed on the gravel just outside the open doors of the conservatory. She was large, sleek, rather heavy-featured. Arrayed in wig and robes, she would have made an impressive judge. Her presence would have added dignity, as well as material weight, to the bench. She was not, however, arrayed in official robes, but merely in mouring—mourning, it may be added, of the order which, among sober-minded persons of the upper classes, denotes widowhood in the passive and permanent rather than the active stage. At the table, two little girls—in brown holland frocks and straw hats of the kind known to contemporary fashion as 'limpet-shaped,'

and fondly believed to compensate by successful preservation of the complexion of the wearer, for the immediate disadvantage of extreme unbecomingness —were sitting silent, absorbed in the assimilation of liberal supplies of cake and grapes, and bread and jam. Further, a handsome, black-headed boy, also consuming cake, but taking his meal in an ambulatory and episodic manner, in the intervals of driving away a tame doe, with a bell round her neck, whose feminine inquisitiveness prompted her to ill-judged inquiries regarding the contents of the teacups and sugar basins. Finally, a clergyman, Kent Crookenden by name, Rector of Brattleworthy with Slerracombe, a bachelor of about fifty, brother-in-law of the lady in the wicker chair, and guardian of her only son, Lancelot—the boy already mentioned.

The Rector had refused to have any tea. He leaned back in another wicker chair, his legs crossed, his coat thrown open, and his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat, surveying the scene before him with an expression of half-contemptuous though not unkindly amusement. Sometimes his eyes wandered from the group in the foreground to a wide stretch of open park, dotted with fallow deer, lying north and west below the terraced garden. The park dipped to the left towards a wooded stream in the hollow, and swept up again into breezy hillside, red and yellow with withering bracken. Beyond it the sea, crossed by wandering tide-lines of the palest azure, spread away calm and oily, under a sky of filmy white cloud, to the high faint line of the horizon.

The view was extremely pleasing in its dreamy

quiet, specially to one with a taste for the characteristic features of West Country scenery. And Kent Crookenden was sincerely attached to the West Country. All the same he was not of the temper of mind that finds its highest and most constant satisfaction in the contemplation of the outward aspects of nature. Hill, wood, stream, moorland, sea, values of light and shade, splendours of colour are, no doubt, immensely elevating objects of attention in their way; but they do not, as a rule, minister largely or directly to the spectator's sense of humour. And Kent Crookenden's sense of humour was almost undesirably keen and persistent. To this, his face—it had no hair on it—bore ample testimony. A square forehead. Bright, steady eyes, set rather far apart. A hooked nose, with a noticeable downward inclination of the tip, the nostrils deep cut and open. A mouth thin-lipped and under hung; the corners of it also with a downward inclination, and with queer twitchings and puckerings about them suggestive of thoughts a trifle too merry or too caustic for ordinary conversation.

After some years of travels both in the East and the United States, at about thirty, Kent Crookenden had suddenly decided to enter the Church. In one respect the decision was, certainly, a wise one. For a strong sense of humour necessarily demands a good supply of raw material, in the form of human nature, upon which to exercise itself; and whatever the more serious privileges of the clerical profession may be, there is no question but that it offers to any man, with the wit to use them, singular facilities for intimate and varied study of the ways and habits, the

weaknesses, the appetites, the endless touching little stupidities in thought and conduct of that most inimitable invention, the human animal.

In due time his elder brother, Zachary Crookenden, had presented him to the living of Brattleworthy with Slerracombe. For that gentleman had bought the advowson of the living when, his fortune having reached very considerable proportions, he married Miss Caroline Hellard—niece of the late and cousin of the present Lord Combmartin—retired from active participation in the affairs of the well-known firm of Crookenden, Manserge and Co., merchants, shipping agents, and bankers, of Bristol and New York; and, having purchased Slerracombe House and some three or four thousand acres of land adjoining, settled himself down to live the leisurely life of an English country gentleman.

Kent Crookenden had ceased to entertain any dreams of ecstatic personal bliss by the time he took up his residence in the ugly, white-washed rectory house at Brattleworthy. And he was consequently very well satisfied with his surroundings. He amused himself greatly by observing the manners and customs of his merchant brother turned squire, of the local gentry, of his fellow-clergy, and of his parishioners. And being a member of the Anthropological Society, and a fair ethnologist and archæologist, he brought a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge to bear up the facts immediately presented to his notice. He had, indeed, *a propos* of certain quaint wedding customs obtaining in the neighbouring fishing village of Beera Mills, written a mono-

graph on Primitive Marriage, which—whatever its scientific value—certainly afforded very gay reading to persons whose mental digestion was not fatally weakened by over refinement.

Upon the still September afternoon in question, the human creature who had the honour of occupying a foremost place in the Rector's attention, was the, as yet, unspecified member of the family party, viz., a slender slip of a girl, whose light movements and rather startling costume rendered her small presence of marked value in the otherwise low-toned picture.

She wore a straight, sacque-shaped frock of orange and scarlet checked cotton, and a broad scarlet sash knotted loosely about her waist. The frock was undeniably short, and revealed the embroidered edge of a white petticoat and a length of open-worked, black silk stocking. Her hat bore no relation to the estimable limpet. It was white, high-crowned, and adorned on one side with a flaring bow of scarlet ribbon. Yet the little lady's complexion did not appear to have suffered to the extent to which, according to all nursery canons of poetical justice, it ought to have suffered from this reprehensible levity of headgear. Her small face was very pale.

Indeed, there were curiously contradictory elements in the little girl's appearance. At a short distance the effect of her vivid figure was like that of some coquettish personage on the lid of a Parisian *bonboniere*. Yet the child's face was not only pale, but full of reserve, of a questioning wistfulness, lighted by a pair of big, wondering, dark-blue eyes. And it was precisely this contradiction, this duality of sug-

gestion, that her uncle, Kent Crookenden, found so interesting as he sat watching her. Mary was twelve years old. Usually an awkward age, as the Rector reflected. It was difficult to say as yet—for she was like a half-fledged bird, all eyes and neck and legs—whether she would grow up commonplace-looking, or develop into an unusually beautiful woman, like——

Mr. Crookenden did not finish the sentence even in thought. He agreed with himself to change the subject immediately. It was a subject, in fact, which for many years he had found a very frequent necessity for changing. But, though his efforts would at first appear successful, he observed that his mental conversation had a tiresome habit of working back into the same groove again before many days, or indeed hours, were over.

On the present occasion he routed the unprofitable subject completely, as he fondly imagined, by turning and addressing his sister-in-law.

'By the way, Caroline,' he remarked, 'if Coad says anything to you about a party of young people from Beera picnicing down at Red Rock, remember I gave them leave to go there. They asked permission very civilly, and I saw no objection to granting it.'

'Yes, I suppose it wouldn't do to refuse people now. If you have finished your tea, Adela, you and Carrie may go'—this over her ample shoulder to the silent little girls in brown holland. 'Of course I never pretended to care about the park being thrown open; but poor Mr. Crookenden made a point of it.'

'Quite right too,' said the Rector.

'And I suppose these people are not likely to do any serious damage.'

'Damage? What possible damage can they or any one else do to a mile of rabbit warren, two or three acres of perpendicular slate and granite, and the Atlantic?'

'Oh, well,' Mrs. Crookenden rejoined, in her calm, well-bred way, 'they leave bottles about, and paper-bags, which is not at all nice. And then the children are very fond of taking their tea down to Red Rock, and I am always rather afraid of infection. With people out of those stuffy little cottages at Beera, one never can be quite sure, you know. Have you said you grace, Carrie?'

This again over her shoulder, with a slow smile at the two girls as they left the table. Then she settled herself back in her chair and applied her fingers to the further development of a nebulous garment in crochet.

The Rector made no reply to his sister-in-law's observations, but his mouth twitched slightly and turned down at one corner.

He held that there was a very healthy reserve force of egotism in Mrs. Crookenden. Her egotism was not of the baser sort, he admitted. It was a comprehensive, tribal kind of egotism, including several persons besides herself. Whether it had ever entirely included her late husband, his brother Zachary, the Rector had never yet been able to determine. Still, in the main, he liked his sister-in-law. She was a distinguished-looking woman; and, save when you trod on the toes of some small prejudice, a very fairly agree-

able one. She was also very fairly amenable to reason, which, considering the relation in which he stood both to her son and the Slerracombe property, was a matter of sincere thanksgiving to the Rector. Moreover, she kept a first-rate cook. I regret to admit this item carried considerable weight in Kent Crookenden's mind.

In the world at large Mrs. Crookenden had the reputation of being a very admirable person. She was of a placid disposition. The whole business of her courtship and marriage had been pre-eminently distinguished for its placidity. As the younger daughter of a younger son—by no means oppressed with a superfluity of worldly goods—she, being a right-minded young lady, had immediately realised the desirability of an alliance with the rich, middle-aged merchant-banker. She accepted him calmly, and without hesitation, when he proposed to her. He had been married before. But his first wife—I speak from the point of view of the poor lady's successor—had had the good taste to die childless. The second Mrs. Crookenden proceeded to fulfil all her marital obligations, the production of a son and heir included, with well-bred composure. And when Mr. Crookenden, after a few years' residence at Slerracombe—finding, somehow, the leisurely life of a country gentleman far harder work than that of the Bristol counting-house—left this world, in which he had laid up such a handsome amount of material treasure, for that other, in which all such treasure is reported to be inconveniently devoid of market value, his wife manifested no objection to surviving him.

In fact, she survived him with what appeared to some persons—among them William Crookenden, now head of the firm, and father of little Mary—an uncalled-for amount of her habitual placidity. The Dowager Lady Combmartin and the Hellard side of the connection, however, took a different view of her conduct. And, being who they were, surely their view must have been the correct one? They declared that —'dearest Carrie, as usual, was behaving quite beautifully. And they did hope, poor darling, after all she had gone through, that she would be rewarded.' It was by way of contributing to this end, I suppose, that they all elected to come down in little batches of twos and threes and stay at Slerracombe shortly after the funeral. The Hellards are a numerous clan, as everybody knows. They hold together. They have a great power of standing back to back. Their Irish estate pays very badly. They are not rich, but they are acquisitive. They make excellent use of their opportunities. A great many of them were a great deal at Slerracombe during that spring and summer; and the weather, I remember, was particularly lovely.

Kent Crookenden derived much edification from the observation of these things. Old Lady Combmartin was most gracious to him, pronouncing him very superior to the rest of the family. Lady Dorothy Hellard, a sprightly spinster whose age it would be uncourteous to state in plain figures, also looked kindly upon him. Said, more than once, how thankful she should be if she could only manage to be more with dearest Carrie in future. Often spoke of her longing for a quiet country life. And remarked casually one

day that, with a little building, the Rectory would not really be such a very bad house. The Rector, however, did not see it; which means that he saw quite clearly enough to see through it, and the notion of running in couples with Lady Dorothy failed to attract him. Possibly the unprofitable subject which he so constantly tried and, alas! failed to expunge from his thoughts, had something to do with this disinclination. For a man may be a good ethnologist and member of any number of learned societies, and yet have a weak unscientific side to him, where sentiment obtains to the lamentable discomfiture of common-sense and pure reason.

But Mrs. Crookenden, being ignorant of the existence of the unprofitable subject, and having had many confidential conversations with old Lady Combmartin, still entertained a hope that the Rector might not remain everlastingly obdurate. Now, as she sat in large, judicial silence developing her woollen crochet garment, her mind was busy, as it had so often been busy before, with devices for bringing round the conversation to marriage in general, and the Lady Dorothy's marriage in particular. Unfortunately, the Rector was somewhat unapproachable when it came to personal matters. And how to offer her cousin to him as permanent lady companion, delicately, diplomatically, yet clearly and unmistakably, Mrs. Crookenden really did not quite see.

Meanwhile Mary, who had been flitting about at the further end of the long strip of turf, suddenly bore down upon her uncle. The girl and the tame doe arrived together with a rush which caused Mrs.

Crookenden to look up from her crochet with an air of cool, remonstrant wonder. She possessed the convenient gift of expressing annoyance and displeasure without resorting to the coarse and more or less compromising medium of speech.

'Please, Uncle Kent, may I go down into the park with Lance?' the girl asked. 'You needn't go home just yet, need you? Lance has been to look at the hall clock. He says it's ever so early.'

Kent Crookenden, though not greatly addicted to caresses, put his arm round the slim, brilliant, little figure, and drew it close to him.

'What do you want to go down into the park again for, Miss Polly?' he asked.

'Why, to draw the deer. They're standing nice and quiet now. And Lance says we can get quite near them.'

It was observable that Mary's voice was singularly low and grave in quality, for a girl of her age.

Kent Crookenden smiled at her, at once tenderly and mockingly, and gently pinched her ear.

'Draw, draw, draw, from morning to night; why, this devotion to the fine arts is astounding, Miss Polly. Do you know, Caroline,' he went on, turning to his sister-in-law, 'this young lady promises to introduce a quite new element into the family history.'

'I think she has introduced it already,' Mrs. Crookenden remarked.

'Yes, perhaps she has,' the Rector said, drily. 'New elements are wholesome. But I was referring specially to the artistic element, which has not, so far, been cultivated very successfully among us

Crookendens. For we can hardly call poor, dear Sara Jacobini, with that impecunious, operatic Hebrew husband of hers, a success, I suppose. By the way, have you happened to hear anything of the poor woman lately, Caroline?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Mrs. Crookenden, a positive richness of negative in her tone.

'Oh! I beg your pardon. I forgot second cousins don't count on my side of the family. All the same, I own I have a weakness for Sara Jacobini. She has stuck by her operatic Hebrew very gallantly, through good report and evil report. I must remember to write to her again. I ought to have written sooner. Well, and so you want to go and draw the deer, Polly; and I want to go home to my books and my dinner. Whose wants are the most imperative, do you think, yours or mine?'

The little girl nestled up against him prettily, coaxingly.—'Mine, I guess,' she said.

Mrs. Crookenden moved slightly, causing her silk dress to rustle and her wicker chair to creak.

'Very well, then, I suppose I must endure the pangs of intellectual and physical hunger and give you half-an-hour longer, young lady. But where is the famous drawing book? Let me look at the labours of the day as far as they have gone yet.'

'I 'low——' began Mary, brightly.

Mrs. Crookenden glanced up from her crochet again, with that same air of cool remonstrant wonder, as though the speaker came perilously near being guilty of contempt of court.

'I 'low I'd just as soon you didn't see it, Uncle

Kent. You never know what my drawings are meant for; anyway, you make believe you don't. Lance always knows, now.'

'Oh! Lance always knows, does he? Lancelot is a monstrously clever fellow,' said the Rector, pinching her ear again.

The boy was standing in front of his uncle, while the tame doe poked her square pinkish-brown muzzle under his arm in the vain effort to get at the leaves on the twig of lime he held just beyond her reach. The doe was strong. She pushed and pressed with her hard muscular shoulders. But the boy was stronger still. He stood his ground. He was not thinking about the doe and her desire for lime leaves, but about his little cousin, and her desire to go down with him into the park again. Lancelot entertained much respectful admiration for his little cousin. He liked to be with her, though she did snub him a good deal at times. Polly was a new experience. He had never seen anybody like her. So he took the snubbing as a part of the general novelty and bore it very good-temperedly.

He was a fine-looking lad, with the square-made figure, short, straight nose, well-shaped mouth—the lips full, yet firm and sweet—crisp hair sitting close to the head, smooth, oval, unshadowed face, and air of serene content which often go with remarkable bodily strength. His check tweed jacket was adorned by a multiplicity of pockets, and had a flap of brown leather let in on either shoulder. He wore very knowing breeches and gaiters. Lancelot hated new clothes. These were sufficiently worn to afford him that most

perfect form of satisfaction which consists in indifference. To know they are so all right that you need not think about them is the acme of happiness in respect of clothes. Across his back he carried a pretty little rifle, slung by a strap.

Kent Crookenden looked from the pale-faced girl leaning against him to this very sportsmanlike young gentleman, and back again. His heavy under-jaw protruded, and his mouth worked into a twitching, caustic smile. Yet his eyes remained wholly kindly.

'Lancelot seems to be making all the running just now, eh, Polly?'

'He's going back to school the day after to-morrow,' she put in, apologetically.

The Rector's smile broadened.

'Oh! I'm not jealous, you conceited little puss. There, go along and draw the deer, or anything else you like in heaven or earth. Take care of her, Lancelot.'

'All right,' the boy said. He stuffed the lime leaves, twig and all, in between the doe's nibbling lips. 'Come along, Polly. I'm awfully glad you may stay. We'll go anywhere you like.'

Then, as the boy and girl went away, side by side, across the terrace garden, the doe, with her tinkling bell, trotting mincingly in front, the Rector rose from his chair and walked slowly to the far end of the bowling-green.

Several little matters had combined to displease Mrs. Crookenden. The black enamel lockets, set with diamonds, depending from her gold bracelets, rattled ominously as she slipped the ivory crochet needle in

and out of the white wool. Only the interests of poor Lady Dorothy had kept her silent. With the exception of Kent Mrs. Crookenden increasingly failed to see the point of her late husband's family. Kent had been passed, so to speak, by the Hellards. That made a great difference. But now Kent himself elected to be annoying; for on coming back, his first observation was—

'Those two young things make rather a pretty pair eh, Caroline?'

The lockets rattled. The ivory needle went steadily in and out, in and out of the white wool. Mrs. Crookenden was never in a hurry.

'I have always strongly disapproved of first cousins marrying,' she said, as though delivering sentence.

The Rector sat down in his wicker chair again.

'My dear Caroline, you positively take one's breath away by your agility in jumping to conclusions. You leap to the ultimate possibility of a situation when the first word of the situation has barely been spoken.'

He leaned back, opened his coat, and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat again.

'But I verily believe you women begin worrying about who your babies shall, and still more shall not, marry before the poor innocents are out of long clothes. It is the same with all of you. Your outlook is saturated with matrimony. In the present case, however, notwithstanding the acknowledged precocity of the rising generation, I don't think you need have much anxiety yet awhile. Still—since you have suggested the idea, Caroline—I may say that Lancelot might do worse, in my humble opinion, than set his

affections on that young lady. If he does not, a good many others will, I fancy, in the course of the next ten years. I suspect she is going to grow into an uncommonly pretty little person. And the Hellard and Coudert strains are strong enough and far enough apart effectually to neutralise any evil results of cousinship on the Crookenden side, I should imagine.'

Mrs. Crookenden looked up. Her countenance presented an expanse of calm but solid displeasure.

'Really this discussion seems to me rather premature,' she said. 'They are mere children. And there are plenty of other people for Lancelot to marry besides your brother William's daughter.'

'Oh! dear yes, the world is wide,' rejoined the Rector, with his twitching smile. 'And Lancelot promises to be a handsome fellow, possessed of a handsome fortune moreover—a magnet with double power of attraction both to maidens and their mothers. He will probably have opportunities of playing pitch and toss to a large extent with the female heart if he chooses to avail himself of them. But I fancy he won't do that. He is a steady, persistent, dependable kind of being; whereas poor little Mary will change her mind, or not know it—which comes to much the same in the end—a good many times before she settles down. Her southern blood will always make it only too possible she should be out of harmony with her English surroundings.'

'Her dress is sufficiently out of harmony with them already,' Mrs. Crookenden remarked. 'And her accent is very peculiar. I have warned Carrie and Adela about it. I should be very sorry if they caught

it. She uses most extraordinary expressions, too. Really, I think your brother William makes a dreadful mistake in leaving her so much with that negro nurse.'

'Mulatress,' interrupted the Rector.

But Mrs. Crookenden was not to be interrupted. She was placid, she was judicial, but she clearly had put on the black cap in respect of little Mary Crookenden's upbringing.

'I don't pretend to know what the degree of colour may be,' she continued. 'To me she is simply a negro woman—a woman who has been a slave, too. It is the most extraordinary arrangement. After his poor wife's death——'

'Ah,' said the Rector, very softly.

'It would obviously have been very much wiser if your brother William had dismissed her and engaged a proper English maid. It would have been much better, of course, to let that curious American element die out altogether.

Kent Crookenden crossed his legs, and patted one foot up and down reflectively on the gravel.

'Oh! no doubt there is much to be said for making a clean sweep after a funeral,' he remarked. 'Relics are a mistake. They sadly mitigate one's appreciation of the blessings of the present. The philosophy of forgetfulness is a very profound philosophy.'

As he spoke he was conscious of an almost painful scraping of his chest, caused by the fluted gold setting of a certain little miniature he wore on a black ribbon round his neck. Artistically considered it was a very worthless little miniature, feebly tentatively painted

and ill-drawn. It represented a young girl of seventeen or eighteen in a prim bodice of a bygone fashion. The young girl's nose was uncertain, her forehead and the lower part of her face were in two different planes. She had little Mary Crookenden's dark blue eyes and shaded fair hair. The Rector fancied the rim of the miniature must have caught against one of the buttons of his undershirt. He gave himself a shake to make it lie flat again.

'If Mary is to be an Englishwoman, then in common justice to her, her father should have her brought up like other children,' Mrs. Crookenden proceeded, in her calm, impressive way. 'Really, to-day, now, her appearance is most extraordinary. I am quite sorry for her, poor child. I am very glad we are alone. I should really regret her being seen except just by ourselves, you know. It is a thing one hardly likes to say of a relation, my dear Kent, but the poor child's appearance is positively vulgar.'

Mrs. Crookenden drew herself up and moved her lips as though she had a bad taste in her mouth.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the Rector. 'I had no idea Mary's red frock was so seriously compromising. We live and learn. Perhaps Mrs. Chloe's taste is a trifle barbaric. But she is a good, fairful soul, nevertheless. And she has taught my cook some excellent Creole dishes, so of course my mouth is stopped. I can't speak evil of her.'

'I am afraid her adulation of Mary is likely to put the poor child in a lamentably false position.'

'Or start her with a wholesome stock of belief in the kindness of her fellow mortals.'

Living alone had begotten a rather prosing habit in Mr. Crookenden, I fear.

'These are the two points of view, Caroline,' he went on. 'Nature takes care of most young things. Gives them nests, or holes, or burrows; affectionate, weak-minded parents to cuddle up against; warms, feeds, shelters them—does her best to put them in a lamentably false position, in short. It is a necessary economy of force, I suppose. For if the poor little wretches did not start with a few delusions regarding their individual importance and the amiability of their species, they would hardly have courage to go on living at all. Just the same takes place in the case of the small human animal. Nature provides it with a silly, doting mother to stand between it and awkward realities, and bolster up its poor little pluck with comfortable lies—'

He broke off abruptly, and gazed at some sea-gulls floating far overhead against the pale blue sky.

'Here there is no mother, you see,' he added, presently. 'And so perhaps the old slave-woman, who has a tender heart notwithstanding her loud taste in dress, may be better than nothing as a shelter to that sensitive little girl.'

Persons blessed with Mrs. Crookenden's description of temperament are not easily convicted of sin. Reproof usually presents itself to them rather as the result of an impertinence on the part of somebody else, than as the result of misdoing on their own. Conscience, indeed, in them is magnificently altruistic—active merely in respect of others. In respect of their own conduct it is finely tranquil. Yet I must

do Mrs. Crookenden the justice to state, that on the present occasion she really had a vague sense of standing reproved. It occurred to her that perhaps she had gone dangerously far, that she had occupied too advanced a position. She prepared to retire from it. But she retired sideways, crab-fashion, and with no violent haste.

'I think we may really leave the subject of little Mary now,' she said, graciously, but in tones of slight superiority. 'I daresay in time she may lose that unfortunate pronunciation. Possibly, as you say, she may grow up pretty. Some people admired her mother very much, I remember.'

The Rector stooped down and picked up a handful of small pebbles off the walk at his feet.

'I never admired her much myself. But then I cannot pretend to care for what is called American beauty.'

'There are Americans and Americans,' put in Kent Crookenden, parenthetically.

His sister-in-law's expression became increasingly gracious. She had removed the black cap. Turned counsel, all of a sudden, instead of judge.

'That is what dear Dorothy Hollard always assures me,' she said. 'By-the-bye, it is curious that our talk should light on just this subject, because in a letter I had from her yesterday from Aldham Revel, she tells me there are some really charming Americans staying in the house. Dear Lady Aldham is quite in love with them. And that reminds me Kent, didn't you tell me you were going to Midlandshire for some partridge shooting this month?'

The Rector was engaged in the intellectual pastime of throwing the pebbles, with extreme nicety of aim, one after the other, at a patch of grey lichen on the conservatory steps. Tap, tap, went the pebbles at regular intervals. He did not answer his sister-in-law till he had disposed of the last of them. Then he said, with a certain deliberation—

'Yes, I may go for a couple of Sundays, at the end of the month, if Ebsworthy can come over from Yeomouth and take the duty. I shall take Mary home to her father in Bristol, stay a week or ten days with him, and then go on to the Aldhams' probably.'

Mrs. Crookenden went through a rapid calculation.

'Dear me!' she exclaimed, 'how exceedingly provoking! You will just miss Dorothy. She leaves on the thirteenth.'

The Rector glanced up, while his mouth twitched into a not altogether encouraging smile.

'Well, Lady Dorothy will not be intolerably disappointed at that fact, I imagine. She will survive,'—Mentally he added, 'And so shall I.'

'She will be disappointed, very much disappointed,' asserted Mrs. Crookenden, quite warmly; 'and so will my aunt. You really must go sooner, Kent. Or let the negro woman take Mary home. You could go to Bristol just as well coming back.'

Mrs. Crookenden dropped her crochet into her large lap and leaned forward, looking at her brother-in-law with a singular mixture of command and amiable invitation.

'You are tiresome, Kent. You never will understand how glad people are to meet you.'

'Lady Dorothy and Lady Combmartin are remarkably kind. You are remarkably kind, too, Caroline,' he said; and he possessed himself of another handful of pebbles.

Mrs. Crookenden was not given to purposeless little movements and fiddlings; yet now she turned the enamel and diamond lockets about almost nervously.

'It is not easy to speak openly to you about certain matters, Kent,' she began. 'Still I feel I ought to put —to put— Surely you see? Surely you cannot be blind to the fact that my aunt has a great regard for you, and that Dorothy—I am very greatly attached to dear Dorothy, you know, and—'

But the Rector held up his hand, pebbles and all.

'Pardon me, Caroline,' he said, very courteously. 'You place me in an awkward position. I can't let you say something we shall both regret; and yet in stopping you I run the risk of appearing a conceited ass with a mightily good opinion of the estimation in which some persons hold him. Frankly I am not—and it is almost certain that I never shall be—in a position to marry.'

Mrs. Crookenden's imagination did not, as a rule, travel rapidly. But on the present occasion it bestirred itself. It took a most remarkable little journey. It suggested the most surprising ideas.

'Why not?' she demanded, with really appalling gravity.

If there had been a spice of malice in the Rector's way of making his announcement, that malice was fully gratified. He was greatly diverted at his sister-in-law's manner.

'For the most practical and conclusive of reasons. I have nothing to settle upon a wife.'

Mrs. Crookenden was so confused by the late excursion of her imagination, that she really could not speak.

'All that I have—I tell you this in confidence, Caroline—will go to my niece, Mary. I am going to cut off all superfluities. I intend to save for her.'

'But her father?'

'Her father won't have very much to leave her, I'm afraid. When he married he was a rich man; but the end of the American war left him with the world to begin over again, as far as his private fortune was concerned. All his money went down in the *Alabama*, or into the stomachs of Stonewall Jackson's soldiers.'

The Rector began throwing the pebbles one by one at the patch of lichen on the steps again.

'All this is most extraordinary,' said Mrs. Crookenden. Her crochet needle recommenced operations upon the white wool in a manner indicative of intense disapproval.

'Barring maternal affection, conjugal affection has, perhaps, the most perverting influence on the judgment,' the Rector said. 'William cared for his wife. His wife cared for the wide-verandahed Coudert Mansion down in Alabama, and for her father, and her brothers, and cousins. It is a heavy trial for any one, specially for a woman, to see the social order in which she was born and bred—whatever its inherent vices may be—crumbling into ruin under her feet and the feet of those she loves.'

The Rector paused. He had spoken with a strength

of feeling by no means common to him. His sister-in-law never remembered to have seen him so much moved before. She was, however, one of those persons who are chilled rather than kindled by the emotions of others.

'I can only repeat that I am very much surprised,' she remarked. 'And that your brother William's conduct appears to me most eccentric.'

'It was unsuccessful in any case, as the event proved. The Coudert Mansion is a court of owls and bats by now, I suppose. The Coudert family is pretty well extinct. The *Alabama* business cost the nation I forget how many million sterling. And William's wife—oh! well, you remember all about that.'

The Rector got up and stretched himself, sticking his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat again.

'Thus do we spend our substance for that which profiteth nothing,' he said.

A footman came out through the conservatory and began clearing the table. Mrs. Crookenden rose, and moved slowly away down the bowling-green towards an arbour where her two brown-holland frocked little girls were playing with a small army of dolls.

'I cannot admit that you are under any obligation to make up to Mary for her father's recklessness,' she said to the Rector, as he walked beside her. 'I really fail to see why you should sacrifice yourself. I cannot see that it is any concern of yours.'

Kent Crookenden's heavy under jaw protruded in an absolutely aggressive manner.

'Ah!' he replied, 'all that would take too long to explain. I have my small eccentricities, too, Caroline.

Lancelot will have his, some day, you'll see. They run in the blood.'

Just then the report of a gun, prolonged by a series of echoes, came from the breezy hillside across the valley.

'I hope that boy will be careful with his rifle,' exclaimed the Rector.

'Lancelot is entirely to be trusted,' rejoined Lancelot's mother, in her most superbly judicial manner.

Chapter II.

'I hate boys,' sobbed Mary Crookenden.

She made this uncompromising statement in an extremely unconventional attitude, lying face downwards in the short crisp heath, while her poor, gaudily-clad, little shoulders quivered convulsively.

Lancelot knelt beside her. His smooth face was rather flushed, his slow, pleasant soul was greatly disquieted within him. The majority of his relations were not troubled with lively emotions; consequently his little cousin's attitude both of mind and body were surprising to him in a high degree. He had shot a rabbit. These passionate tears, this alarming declaration, were the result. It was all really very confusing. For rabbits were there to be shot. That was what you had them for. And then, only yesterday, had he not heard his Uncle Kent tell Eliot, the head keeper, they really must be kept under? They were becoming a perfect nuisance to the farmers. Lancelot would have been glad to explain this to his cousin.

But words did not come readily to him. Moreover, it is difficult to make explanations to the back of a head, to a frock, to a sash, and a pair of open-work silk stockings. To set to work to justify your conduct to that part of your hearer which happens to be uppermost, demands an amount of self-confidence which Lancelot did not possess. So he found nothing better to say than—'Please don't cry so, Polly.'

'I shall cry just all I want,' returned the little girl, in a stifled voice from out of the heath.

This reply was hardly encouraging. The boy looked at her helplessly. A queer sense of shyness was upon him. It gave him the oddest feeling to see her fair hair caught and strained by the upstanding shoots of heath. He grew hot. He wished she would move. He wished somebody would come. He was vaguely alarmed at being there alone with her. The violence of her emotion seemed to put him at a great distance from her, to make them strangers. Lancelot was at a loss how to cover that distance, and reopen friendly relations. But, above all, the sight of her fair hair tangled in the heath made him horribly uncomfortable.

'Polly,' he said, humbly, desperately, at last, 'please would you mind doing the rest of your crying sitting up?'

'I won't do anything you ask me to,' she sobbed out. 'You're cruel.'

As the Rector had said, the boy was persistent. He was hurt at the rebuff; yet he stuck to his point.

'But there are lots of spiders about here, you know, and tiger-beetles and things. I don't suppose they'd

bite or sting you, but—well, I shouldn't like them to crawl over you, Polly.'

To his great relief this appeal was not without effect. The little girl raised herself slowly, reluctantly.

'Are you quite sure it's quite dead?' she asked, her breath catching between the words.

'The rabbit? Why, of course it is—dead as a nail.'

Mary's pale face was disfigured by tears. Her eyelids were swollen and red. She looked at him, moreover, with an expression of concentrated reproach and scorn, that was anything but complimentary. Still the boy's spirits rose. He felt more secure, more every-day and comfortable now he could see her face.

'There are no end of rabbits all over the place, you know,' he said. 'There are loads of them left, you know, Polly.'

'That one sat up. I saw it.'

'Oh! they can all sit up when they like, you know,' he rejoined, anxious to prove his victim was but as other rabbits are, not an abnormal, acrobatic genius among rodents.

Then Lancelot suddenly grew braver. He sat down on the carpet of heath close beside his cousin, dragged out his pocket-handkerchief—fortunately it was a clean one—and proceeded to dab her eyes gently with it.

'I'm awfully sorry you minded so much,' he said. 'If I'd known you'd mind I wouldn't have shot it, Polly, indeed I wouldn't. Please say you don't hate boys, Polly.'

Now his hand undoubtedly smelt of metal, of grease

even, from much contact with the gun-barrel, and Mary was a dainty little person very sensible of small disgusts, yet she endured his attentions resignedly. For she was not strong. Anger, pity, tears had fairly tired her out. And physical exhaustion is uncommonly demoralizing. A weary body refuses to respond to the call of the virtues militant. It informs them almost peevishly that they are a bore. It entirely refuses to help them to go forth to war and rout about. Little Mary Crookenden wished to continue to deplore the untimely fate of the rabbit, wished to keep this young murderer in well-merited disgrace; but she was physically unequal to the exertion. Her sense of the enormity of the boy's crime began to give way before an instinctive demand for rest and sympathy. Her sobs grew faint and fainter, sinking down into an occasional long-drawn sigh. Her poor little head ached. Unconsciously she leaned again the late disturber of her peace, letting her aching head rest upon the flap of leather let in to the shoulder of his jacket.

Behind them the bracken and heather-clad slope swept upward some twenty or thirty yards to the edge of the cliffs that face the sea—here a clean drop of just upon three hundred feet to the grey beach below. Before them was a wide expanse of rough hilly country, intersected by a network of thickly wooded valleys, lying in warm misty shadow, save where the globular crown of an oak, or the ragged head of a silver fir, overtopping the surrounding sea of foliage, caught the sunset light. Rising from the valleys, little fields, absurdly cocked up on end—

green pasture, rich, red plough land, and yellow stubble around the glistering corn shocks, sleeping in a glory of golden haze. Above, again, a long hog's-back of hill, the straight line of it broken here and there by a few crooked trees bending away as though in terror from the stormy west, rose, dark purple, against the suffused radiance of the sunset sky.

And Lancelot Crookenden looked out over the shadowy woods and golden fields into that radiant sky, a sort of wonder in his young eyes. For the boy was making notable discoveries just then. They were honest, pure-minded discoveries, for he was blessed with the wholesome temperament which has a happy incapacity for making discoveries other than honest. All the same, I am afraid, could she have known of them, the discoveries in question—being made in this particular connection—would have met with his mother, Mrs. Crookenden's very sincere disapproval. For notwithstanding his love of cricket-bats, and fishing-rods, and guns, his distaste for Latin primers and Greek grammars, and the first book of Euclid and all the rest of that which directs the footsteps of reluctant English youth along the road of scholastic and academic honours, this quiet-natured, sturdy schoolboy was laying hold of what, after all, has inspired the finest fancies of those classic poets whose lines he found it so abominably dull to copy and difficult to construe; of what has called literature, and art too, pretty well into existence; of what has, indeed, been the main agent in keeping life alive and the earth peopled ever since the day when Adam, waking from the strange deep sleep that fell on him in Eden,

found Eve, new born, beside him—found woman, the secret of the Fall and of the Redemption, alike, lying hid as yet within her; and, in finding her, found also what she is fated forever to carry along with her, the mystery, the glory, the cruel riddle and tragedy of sex.

Our fourteen-year-old, modern schoolboy, however, let me hasten to add, apprehended this tremendous matter in its very simplest and most innocent expression. He was dumbly aware that a certain pleasure is derivable from mopping a little maiden's wet eyes, while her head rests languidly on your shoulder. It is an odd sort of pleasure, making you shy and bold, glad and awkward, all at once. It induces in you a most confusing jumble of opposing feelings. Yet, as a whole, the result is agreeable, distinctly agreeable. Lancelot went so far as to hope Mary would make no proposal of going home just yet.

But after a few minutes' silence the girl raised her head—'Listen,' she said; 'there is some one singing.'

Immediately below the spot where they were sitting the slope is crossed by a grass path, a winding ribbon of green amid the darker tones of the gorse and heath. This path leads through a gnarled, moss-grown oak wood and past a couple of flat meadows lying at the bottom of the glen, to a dip in the wall of cliffs, known as Red Rock Mouth. Here the streams draining Slerracombe deer-park and the neighbouring valleys empty themselves, filtering down in a score of clear runlets through the purple-grey shingle into the sea.

And it was from this path, away to the right where it emerged from the covert and turned the shoulder

of the hill, that the sound of voices, which had attracted Mary's attention, came. They were charmingly fresh young voices, with a curiously moving lift in them as they rose and fell on the light evening wind, giving out the wandering discursive tune of an old Methodist hymn—

> Oh! the pilgrims of Zion are a blessed band,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!
> Liking waving corn in a fruitful land
> In ranks round the great White Throne they'll stand,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!

This sung with a certain fervour and conviction of triumph—sinking down suddenly into the wailing refrain—

> Lord, do not long delay,
> Lord, wipe our tears away;
> Through life's long earthly day
> See how we strive and pray.

As the singers, a company of some twelve or fourteen young men and women, came into sight, an instinct of good breeding made Lancelot Crookenden move a little away from his cousin. He rose to his feet and stood beside her with a half-defined purpose of protection.

Notwithstanding their vocal lamentations over the troubles of this world, and warmly expressed desire for speedy translation to a more satisfactory one, the singers in question came along the grass path merrily enough, their shadows lying slantwise across the hillside in the tender sunlight. The young women walked first, clinging together in little groups, their light cotton dresses and quick movements making them seem like some flight of bright, fearless birds. There was

a pretty gay grace about them as they turned, from time to time, to pass a word or two laughingly with the company of young men following behind,—sailors and fisher-lads, wearing roomy pilot-cloth suits or close-fitting jerseys, loitering along, hands in trouser-pockets, in lazy, swinging, sea-going fashion. Handsome, well-made young fellows, some dark and fine-featured, others red-bearded and blue-eyed—eyes of a strange, dreamy blue that seem to reflect the joy and romance of the ocean as truly as they reflect its colour.

As the procession passed, most of the young women treated little Mary Crookenden to inquiring glances, and whispered to one another comments on her tearful appearance. Lancelot tried hard not to hear. He wished they wouldn't; what business was Polly of theirs? The men were discreetly indifferent, though several touched their caps in passing. One of them, a tall, sunburnt, young sailor, paused a moment, and spoke.

'Parson Crookenden told us we might go down to Mouth, sir,' he said.

'Yes, I know, it's all right. How d'ye do, David?' the boy answered, flushing a little at this recognition of his proprietorship. 'Mr. Crookenden told us about it. I hope you've enjoyed yourselves.'

There was a tittering among the nearest group of girls.

'You've enjoyed yourself rarely, ain't you, Steve?' one of them called teazingly over her shoulder to a large, fair-haired, rather sheepish-looking man, walking a little apart from the rest.

David glanced at her sharply and then addressed Lancelot again civilly enough—'Yes, much obliged to you, sir. It's my sister Jenny's birthday, and nothing 'ud serve her and the other maids but they must have a picnic over to Red Rock.'

'Who's that?' Mary asked, as the sailor moved away. 'What made him look so cross.'

'Oh! that's David Parris. He's an awfully nice fellow; he's second mate on board Sir Reginald Aldham's yacht. But they've laid her up now because of getting back for the partridges. And then he comes home here, to Beera, for the herring-fishing. What makes you say he was cross, Polly?'

'The way he looked.'—Mary sighed, wearily, and put her hand up to her head.—'I suppose we ought to go. It must be ever so much more than half an hour. But I'm so tired, Lance. I don't believe I shall ever get home,' she said.

Lancelot paused before answering. A daring idea suggested itself to him. But the same instinct that had made him get up from beside his cousin a few minutes back, told him it would be more becoming not to put it into execution before spectators, and two fresh figures had just come upon the scene.

'If you didn't mind, I believe I could carry you all right, Polly,' he said. 'But here are some more of these Beera people. We'll let them get by first.'

In front walked a young woman, less well-dressed than those who had gone by already, but taller and more stately than they. The bodice of her old grey stuff dress was hardly full enough for the rounded bust it covered; while her scanty skirts clung some-

what closely to her limbs as she moved. One hand was full of trails of crimson and yellow bramble leaves. In the other she dangled a rather dilapidated black hat. Her complexion had the peculiarly rich bloom on it, born of the moist, warm, West Country climate, which is almost startling to inland eyes in its richness. The coils of her dark hair had become unfastened and hung untidily perhaps, but with an undeniably picturesque effect, below the waist.

Later in life this ripeness of coloring and opulence of physical development might degenerate into coarseness; but with the freshness of nineteen upon them they were unquestionably rather superb. Just now, too, the young woman's beauty was heightened by a pretty sharp fit of anger, that made her full lips tense, and quickened the light in her grey eyes. She carried her head erect, and swung along with a fine air of concentration. All the world might have looked on, she would not have cared a pin. She was entirely engrossed by her own not very amiable or agreeable sensations.

Following her rapidly along the grass-path, came a man of not, it must be owned, particularly prepossessing personal appearance. One might judge him to be three or four and twenty. He was high-shouldered. His clothes had seen better days. Yet the aspect both of them and their wearer established, even at first sight, a social distinction between him and the rest of the party. That he was a gentleman—in the wider application of that slightly offensive term—there could be no doubt, though he was by no means as responsible or even solvent looking an individual as the

majority of the sailors and fisher-lads on ahead. Slung across his shoulders he carried a bulging satchel, while the end of a japanned colour-box stuck out of one of his jacket pockets.

Just before passing the boy and girl he stopped dead, and stood pushing up the moustache that lay like a rusty brown bar across his face, staring meanwhile in a curiously restless, intimate, comprehensive sort of way at little Mary Crookenden.

On in front the singing had begun again, one fresh voice after another taking up the wavering tune.

> Oh! the pilgrims of Zion will find a sure rest;
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!
> Like tired birds in a swinging nest
> They'll be cradled to sleep on Abraham's breast,
> Shout to the Lord of Glory!

As the last words grew indistinct in the distance, Mary Crookenden rose to her feet. For a second or two she stood looking full at the stranger—her slim, fantastic figure flaming in the slanting sun-rays, against a background of purple-brown heather and withering bracken. Then she turned her back upon him with a very telling little movement of offended dignity. She thought him ugly. And, her uncle Kent and Chloe, her nurse, excepted, she strongly objected to persons who had the misfortune to be ugly.

'I am quite ready, now, Lance,' she said, rather imperiously, in her full grave tones. 'Do you hear? I want to go home. I can quite well walk. Who's that man?' she added, coming close to the boy. 'I don't like him.'

Lancelot was vaguely sensible of disliking the

stranger also. Even more than of the inquiring young girls, he asked, 'What business was Polly of his?'

'One of those painting chaps from Beera,' he said, with a flavour of contempt.—The arts do not, as a rule, appeal largely to the mind of the British public-school boy.—'There are a whole lot of them about in the summer always, you know. Are you sure you're not too tired to walk, Polly?'

'What does he paint?' Mary asked, with a sudden awakening of interest.

'Oh! all sorts of things. I'm sure I don't know, Polly—what they always do paint, I suppose. The village, and the quay, and the skiffs, and all sorts of things.'

'You mean he's an artist. Oh! how I wish I had known that. Why ever didn't you tell me at once, Lance? I wish I could speak to him.'

Poor Lancelot was greatly perplexed by this unexpected ardour. He did not understand it.—'Why, Polly, how changeable you are,' he exclaimed; 'two minutes ago you said you didn't like him.'

'But I didn't know he was an artist,' the little girl answered, quite excitedly. 'Do you think he'd show me his pictures? Do stop him, Lance, and ask him.'

She ran down into the grass path, all her late exhaustion forgotten, and looked anxiously after the high-shouldered young man.—'Lance, Lance, come here. Come directly. He isn't gone far yet. Do stop him,' she cried.

Meanwhile the painter had overtaken the young woman in the grey gown. He was speaking to her

eagerly. She paused, in obedience apparently to some question from him, and looked back.

'I can't see plain, Mr. Colthurst,' she said, impatiently. Her feelings were not under the best control, and she spoke in an unnecessarily loud tone. 'I can't see plain, the sun's in my eyes. But I expect it's the little Miss Crookenden as is staying up to parsonage over to Brattleworthy, with the black nurse.'

'Black nurse? How on earth does she come by a black nurse, Jenny?' he asked, stammering a good deal, and still looking in the direction of Mary Crookenden. 'That is most suitably picturesque.'

The masculine and feminine standpoints are notably different; and, let chivalry protest as it may, the former frequently has the grace of being the more modestly sensitive of the two. Even at fourteen promiscuous notice and interest appeared to Lancelot Crookenden to come perilously near insult. He was seized with a violent desire for escape. He did not want to hear any more.

'Come along, Polly,' he said, catching hold of his cousin's hand and bundling her down the hillside by a narrow rabbit-track, with most unceremonious haste.

'Oh! I wanted to speak to him,' she cried, breathlessly. 'Why do you mind, Lance? Let go my hand. You hurt. Why are you so rough?'

'He ought to have known we could hear,' the boy said, slackening his pace. 'I haven't really hurt you, have I, Polly? But I call it awfully caddish to talk about you like that before your face.'

'But it's quite true what they said. I am staying at Brattleworthy, and I have got a darkey nurse. I'm

glad,' she added, reflectively, 'it is suitably picturesque to have a darkey nurse.'

Again Lancelot's soul was disquieted within him. Strange, new, incomprehensible feelings again stirred him; but he had ceased to find them pleasant, he had ceased to be glad. A vague, jealous displeasure possessed him. Was he unconsciously seeing further into, gaining a deeper experience of that same tremendous riddle of sex?

'What have you been crying for, Miss Polly?' the Rector asked her some half hour later.

Lancelot had gone indoors, and the two were walking down the beech and sycamore avenue running parallel to the high wall of the Slerracombe kitchen gardens.

'Oh! I was foolish, Uncle Kent. I cried because of the rabbit Lance shot. It squeaked, and that made me feel badly, and I was ever so angry. Lance was very sorry. He didn't mean to make me cry. He was ever so nice to me afterwards.'

Kent Crookenden stuck out his under jaw, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly.

'The old story,' he said. 'A woman always likes to administer punishment herself—fall upon the culprit in hot haste herself, and then protect him vigorously from the judgment of far juster judges. Well, you make a capital advocate, young lady, though your pleading has a touch of the personal note. The man who gets you to undertake his case will escape with a pretty light sentence, I fancy.'

Unfortunately, however, Mary's imagination was powerful. The remembrance of the rabbit's death

shriek, of the scattered tufts of soft grey fur, of the shuddering blood-stained little body, was too much for her.

'It was such a nice one, Uncle Kent,' she said; 'and it put up its ears and sat up. And it looked so happy. Why must people kill things? It wasn't doing Lance any harm.'

'Ah! there we have an awkward question—a question neither you nor I shall get to the bottom of in a hurry, Miss Polly. Poor little rabbit, like a good many other people cut off in the midst of his days—and then the reason of it!'

He looked down smilingly at the girl, whose great eyes were wide with questioning pity.

'However, if he was a right-minded, well-conducted rabbit, no doubt he is safe in heaven by this time,' he added.

'I wish I believed that,' Mary answered, sadly. 'But Auntie Chloe says it's only men and women have got souls that go to heaven.'

'Does she, though, the old, spiritual aristocrat! And how does Mrs. Chloe come to know that, Polly? Has she ever climbed up to heaven to ascertain for herself what gains admittance there and what does not?'

'Well, Uncle Kent, I 'low you haven't climbed up there either,' Mary remarked.

The sun had just dipped below the western horizon. It threw up rays of widening brightness towards the zenith, while the park and the vast levels of the almost white sea beyond, stretched quiet, singularly reposeful, below that gigantic, pulsing fan of saffron

and pale primrose light. Kent Crookenden stood a short space gazing at the serene landscape, at the noble immensity of ocean and sky, and then looked down at the slim, orange and scarlet figure clinging to his arm. The fluted gold setting of the faded miniature had ceased to scrape his chest.

'Ah! Polly,' he said, 'I am not so sure about that. I entertain a pleasing belief that I have been there once or twice, for a minute or so; and that heaven proved to be a far roomier place than most pious persons down here are willing to picture it.'

The miniature lay flat on his chest—an oval of weight, but a light one. In his own fashion, a silent one in this case, Kent Crookenden had personally, perhaps, solved the tragic, tormenting riddle of sex.

Still that night, as the statuesque mulatto woman was engaged in undressing her little mistress, when the latter—after a graphic account of the events of the day, her glimpse of the real but, alas! unattainable artist included—ventured to touch on her uncle's delightful suggestions regarding the possible existence of celestial rabbit-warrens, Mrs. Chloe rejoined concisely—

'Don't you berlieve him, honey.' Adding, after a pause—'You'll find, Miss Mary, darlin', clever folks can talk a mighty 'mount of foolishness when dey done sot to.'

Chapter III.

It must have been past seven o'clock when Colthurst, and the young woman in the grey gown, turned off

the main road at Beera Cross down the steep lane leading into the mile-long wooded combe, at the bottom of which lies the fishing village of Beera Mills. They had walked the four miles between Sleeracombe and the cross road at a fair pace, still keeping, however, at some distance behind the rest of the party. Jenny still carried her head erect, and her face still wore an expression of annoyance. The young woman's power of self-control was regrettably limited. She felt strongly and reasoned little—a combination frequently leading to unfortunate complications.

The sun had set some time. But the sky was clear, and the twilight lingered, covering the shadowy woods and steep slopes of furze croft and fern-brake on either side the road with a mysterious dimness. Bats darted to and fro on flittering, leathery wings, hawking for unwary gnats and flies. As the valley narrowed in descending, the hollow booming of the ground-swell came up from the rocky shore far below, the sound seeming to get entangled in the thick leafy wood, and to hang there in a hoarse, continuous murmur. Now and again the stillness was cut by the sharp bark of a dog at some farm upon the high ground inland, answered by the plaintive bleat of sheep or lowing of cattle—by a laugh or snatch of song from the party of young men and women on ahead—by the plash and tinkle of the stream in its deep channel by the roadside, overhung with hart's-tongue and fragile lady-fern, trailing St. John's-wort, and delicate lilac geranium—by a sudden shiver of air among the light foliage of the birches, their pale

stems gleaming ghostly against the dark background of beech and oak. From the wood, too, came a moist clinging odour of earth and rotting leaves, that mingled with the pungent peaty smell of the moorland. Overhead, showing faint in the dusky blue of the evening sky, were a few stars.

An hour and a scene eminently adapted for the engendering of tender sentiments, for the perpetration of small follies. And now enter Corydon and Phyllis! One can guess only too accurately what is likely to follow.

I am bound to assert, however, that notwithstanding their provocatingly poetic surroundings, this particular Corydon and Phyllis—Mr. James Colthurst, younger son of the late Dr. Ridley Colthurst, whose eloquence for so many years drew overflowing congregations to St. Saviour's Chapel, at Tullingworth (the living, it may be remembered, is in the gift of the Simeon trustees), and Jane Parris, daughter of William Parris, sometime able seaman now fisherman, of Beera Mills and local preacher among the Bible Christians of his native village and of the neighbouring parishes of Brattleworthy and Codd's Camp—that when these two young persons had passed the small church, clinging against the hill-side, and reached the deeper gloom cast by the steep woods on either side of the way, they appeared quite unlikely to take advantage of the excellent opportunity for love-making afforded them by their present circumstances. For Colthurst knew that his companion was the long-promised bride of her cousin Stephen Kingdon, a young sailor just home from a voyage to Odessa,

While Jenny was vaguely but momentarily growing more convinced that whoever in the future might become Mrs. James Colthurst, that high privilege was not reserved for her.

This growing conviction—a painful one, it must be owned, to poor Jenny—was in part, at all events, the result of the young man's present conversation. Colthurst had a bad habit of holding forth upon any subject that happened to be uppermost in his thoughts, without careful consideration of its suitability to the feelings or intelligence of his hearers. He had a necessity for self-expression. For the last mile he had talked eagerly and persistently, regardless of very clear indications of vexation on the part of his companion. Perhaps Colthurst did not altogether object to vexing Jenny a little. She looked prodigiously handsome when she was angry.

'It was not only the child's dress,' he said, 'which made her so original. It was the startling contrast between her dress and her expression. At first it seemed as if she was got up for a masquerade. There was a touch of positively tropical splendour about her. And then when you looked again you were reminded of all sorts of cold, pure, transparent things, of ice and snow. There was something polar, absolutely polar, in her little white face and those great eyes. They are that purple-blue, by the way, you only see in high mountain tarns.'

The young man's speech was low and rapid, with a hissing prolongation of the sibilants. It was frequently broken by a hesitating stutter before certain consonants. This stutter increased distressingly un-

der excitement. Colthurst frequently, indeed, found himself seriously inconvenienced by it. He was naturally somewhat irritable, and this thorn in the flesh, this inability to get his words out, caused him keen provocation, often making him shy and awkward just when he wanted most to carry things with a high hand. Alone with Jenny Parris, however, his tendency to stammer was agreeably in abeyance.

'I have not seen anything so suggestive, so downright pathetic in the way of a child's face for a long time,' he went on. 'By the side of that stolid boy she looked like an exquisite little bit of Venetian glass beside a common earthenware beer mug. You say she is staying at Brattleworthy, Jenny. Tell me some more about her.'

'I don't know any more, Mr. Colthurst, and what's more I don't want to,' the girl replied, impatiently. 'She came down along one day last week—you were painting old Mr. Fulford up to Withacott—and she'd got a great, ugly, black woman along of her, just like the figure-head Aunt Sarah Jane's got put up in the garden. The children run and scritched as if they'd met a dragon. I don't want to see her again. She was just the hideousest creature I ever set eyes on.'

Colthurst revelled in incongruities. There was unquestionably a sinister vein in him, a rather morbid enjoyment of all that is strange, jarring, unexpected, abnormal. Some persons, indeed, have gone so far as to accuse him of a love of actual physical deformity and a relish of horror for mere horror's sake. But this accusation, I think, is unjust. No doubt his power of appreciation was widely catholic, his view

of beauty an original one. Yet he invariably, as far as I could see, rejected that which was unnatural or unsavoury, unless the presentation of it formed so essential a part of his subject that to omit it was to spoil the point of the story. If it was a necessary part of the drama, he portrayed it with an honest and fearless hand. And that he probably enjoyed doing so I am not prepared to deny. In truth, the number of artists—in any department—who have the gift of calling spades spades, rather than agricultural implements, is a very small one. To ask them not to exercise this distinguishing gift, when they do possess it, is a trifle hard. A trifle useless, too, perhaps; for unless they are contemptibly false to the demands of their own talent they certainly will not listen to you.

In the present case the notion of the swarthy nurse and little Miss Crookenden going down Beera Street, while the small natives scuttled away in terror, struck Colthurst as pleasantly grotesque.

'They must have made a delicious pair,' he remarked; 'I wish I had seen them. Go on; tell me some more, Jenny. Hideousest is very good in its way, but I want more detail, more local colour. How was the black woman dressed, now?'

'Like a guy,' returned Jenny, promptly.

Colthurst glanced at her in some amusement. He was beginning to know the tones of the young woman's voice remarkably well. They were most expressive. Jenny, so her companion held at least, was a book printed in very large type and easy enough to read. He proceeded to try and read a little further.

'But did you happen to observe the child's face carefully when we saw her just now?' he went on. 'She had been crying. It is not often a child cries to such good purpose. She was the embodiment of a whole tragic poem, with those red-brown eyelids, and blanched cheeks, and that glaring frock. Just the kind of subject I care for. It taxes both one's imagination and one's technical skill. Don't you imagine these remarks are a bid for tears on your part though, Jenny,' he added, glancing quickly at her again. 'They would not suit you, they are not in your style.'

'Whether they'd suit me or no you'd not get mun for the asking, I can tell you, Mr. Colthurst,' she rejoined, hotly.

Colthurst smiled as he pushed his moustache up from his lip. It was really a pity the shadow of the woods was so deep just here, for he could not see Jenny's face clearly; for he was under an impression that she was pre-eminently well worth seeing clearly at this moment, as she swung down the steep road by his side—her action as free yet as well-poised and harmonious as that of some Amazon on a Greek frieze.

'Shouldn't I get them, Jenny?' he said. 'Well, fortunately I don't propose asking for them, at all events not just yet. When I pack up my traps and bid good-bye to you and your delightful Beera you may pay me the tribute of a few tears if you like. I shall not be there to see the doubtfully satisfactory after-effects of them. I suppose it is really a merciful dispensation of providence that most women are anything but engaging when they have been crying,' he continued. 'For if they looked as that child did, one

might be tempted to torture them from time to time —moderately of course—just for the pleasure of sitting down and staring at them afterwards.'

Jenny made no immediate reply, but flicked at the bats circling about her head with the old black hat she still carried in her hand. Presently, however, disappointment getting altogether the upper hand, she broke out inconsequently:—'She's a proud enough little image, I'll be bound. They all are, those Crookendens—a proud, stuck-up lot. The boy's the best of 'em, though you do liken him to a beer-mug, Mr. Colthurst. He's been on board the yacht a time or two with Parson Crookenden and Sir Reginald; and Dave says a nicer, freer-spoken, civiler young gentleman they never had aboard of her.'

'Oh! no doubt. He is just the sort of sleek, well-conditioned, young prize animal everybody is safe to admire. That is exactly why I don't admire him, you see, Jenny. His good looks are altogether too obvious.'

'They don't belong to the place neither, those Crookendens don't,' the girl continued, glad to get hold of any subject upon which to vent her ill-humour without, as she flattered herself, betraying the real cause of it. 'The old man came from Bristol and bought it when Squire Tremenheer died. There was Parrises living down to Beera two hundred years ago and more, Mr. Colthurst, before ever these Crookenden folks came about. If you don't believe me you can see it in the registers Parson Hawley keeps in the strong box up to church. Many's the time I've heard Aunt Sarah Jane and father tellin' about mun. If

you don't believe me, Mr. Colthurst, just go and see mun for yourself.'

Her vehemence greatly amused the young man. But Colthurst's amusement was of the observant, intellectual kind which rarely finds expression in laughter. For laughter, if it is genuine, usually implies a certain leisurely element in the mind,—a power of mental standing still and contemplating oneself and that fraction of the universal economy immediately submitted to one's notice in an easy, after-dinner attitude. It is hardly too much to say that James Colthurst's mind never stood still. It went on and on, as his quick, noiseless footsteps went on now down the winding road, driven forward by the workings of strong, restless energy within. He was always thinking, doing, feeling, experiencing something—and that a perfectly definite something. Always registering impressions, making observations, always feeding his somewhat lurid imagination with visions of future influence and renown. Such a man has little enough time to waste in the society of dear, comfortable, lazy Laughter, with its epicurean acquiescence in things in general—itself included—its genial enjoyment of small surprises, and kindly gossipy appreciation of the manifold absurdities so continually visible in the ways of this cranky world. Colthurst regarded the world as a nut to be cracked, an oyster to be opened; at best as a battlefield whereon his talent and determination might win a great victory. The victory was some way off yet, for the young man's hopes were considerably happier than his present fortunes. But Colthurst had faith in himself.

From the forgoing statement it must not be supposed that James Colthurst was one of those fortunate beings who, proposing to themselves the attainment of certain objects, proceed to walk straight along the shortest and surest road to the said objects, never looking either to the right hand or the left. He had two distinct sides to his nature which were for ever playing a game of skill, so to speak, with each other. Sometimes the intellectual side had the game all its own way. And then suddenly the emotional side, which had seemed curiously slow and short-sighted as to its opportunities of gaining the advantage, would in a few skilful moves come to the fore and cry *check*, before its opponent had had time to organise any sufficient system of defence. Plurality of personality is very impeding and dislocating. To manage one human being is often hard enough work, heaven knows! But to manage two—of whom the first is ardent, passionate, reckless, sensuous, sensitive, and the second strong, hard, ambitious, doggedly self-confident and self-assertive—joined together in an indissoluble bond of wedlock, this is indeed a task from which a man, without any notable defect of moral courage, may well cry for deliverance.

Now, as Colthurst heard Jenny Parris' unnecessarily vigorous defence of the respectability of her own lineage, saw the toss of her handsome head as she swung down the road in the clinging dusk, the emotional side of his nature made a move forward. He was amused at her vehemence, but he was by no means displeased at it. He stopped and looked at her, leaning both hands on the knob of his walking-stock,

'Up-p-on my word,' he said, in that rapid whispering way of his, and with an access of stammering, 'if I was a conceited fellow, Jenny, I should b'begin to flatter myself you were paying me the compliment of growing slightly jealous.'

Jenny had paused also. She drew herself up to her full height. She was very nearly as tall as the young man, and the evening dimness seemed to magnify the proportions of her fine figure. She folded her arms, holding her head well back. Jenny's attitudes were instinctively dramatic.

'Well,' she answered, rather magnificently, 'perhaps I am a bit jealous. And some of the others would be jealous too, I expect, if they'd heard you tellin' and tellin' about that little Crookenden maid like you have all the way back from Slerracombe. Of course I know well enough you ain't one of us, Mr. Colthurst. Your people are gentlefolks, and when you see gentlefolks you begin hankering after mun. It's nature, I suppose; you can't help yourself. But you've lived along of us gettin' on for six months, and our ways have been good enough for you. And now it 'ud aggravate a saint, that it would, to hear you so taken up with a little peaked-faced bit of a maid, just because——'

The girl broke off abruptly, and flicked at the bats with her old hat again.

'Just because what, Jenny?' inquired Colthurst.

'Oh, you needn't pretend you don't know, Mr. Colthurst,' she replied, her voice rising in scornful emphasis. 'Why, just because you think she's a bit better than us. I tell you us Parrises are as good as

those Crookenden people any day. But the only gentlefolks that go for anything worth namin' are the ones as have the money.'—Jenny began striding down the hill again.—'We've bin deceived in you, Mr. Colthurst,' she said, fiercely. 'We ain't of any account with you after all, though you have let on to seem so friendly, coming out along of us to-day when Dave asked you and all. There, then; go along back to your gentlefolks, if you're so set on 'em, Mr. Colthurst—that's all I've got to say.'

These last words appeared to the young man to have a decided flavour of sarcasm about them. They nettled him considerably.

'They would be so d-delighted to receive me, wouldn't they?' he replied, stammerly badly. 'A poor, seedy devil of a painter, worse dressed than their footman, is so likely to find the doors of great houses thrown open to welcome him. As you very truly observed just now, money is the only thing that tells—not talent, not birth. It d-doesn't matter who you are or what you can do, if your pockets are empty you go under.'—Colthurst set his teeth and cut savagely at the ferns edging the brook.—'But I tell you p-people are a good deal mistaken if they imagine I am going to stay under. I know the worth of my work if no one else does. The world will have to reckon with me one of these days. And I'm not soft. It's bound to come in time. I can wait.'

The girl made no answer. Often she had but a vague understanding of her companion's talk. It was, to use a colloquialism, very much over her head. And then, as in the present case, it seemed to widen the

social distance between them cruelly. Poor Jenny dumbly but very bitterly resented all such widening.

About half-way down the combe a bridge of rough slabs of slate spans the brook, and gives access, by means of a gate, to a rutted cart-track leading up through the wood to a disused stone-quarry. This cart-track is bordered, for the first thirty yards or so, by a larch plantation, which, as the evening air stirred the branches, gave off a resinous fragrance. Colthurst paused and turned aside to inhale it. These fresh woodland scents were peculiarly delicious to him. There is a certain unhistoric purity, so to speak —a disconnectedness with man and the doubtfully profitable ways of him—in the odours and aspects of sylvan vegetation that is eminently refreshing. To Colthurst his fellow mortals were absorbingly—in a sense, offensively—interesting. They possessed such splendid powers; and were, at the same time, to his thinking, so hopelessly weighted by stupidity; nearly all of them so obstinate, so secure of their individual infallibility, yet so few of them grasping their own lives as a whole and knowing definitely what they purposed doing with the years of nights and days accorded to them upon this very extraordinary planet. And it was just because of his strong and constant consciousness of the claims and all the perplexing phenomena of humanity, that the unhumanity of the woods so attracted him. Trees rooted always in the same place—permanent, peaceful, resigned, undesiring beings, with their marvellous complexity and variety of beauty, their passionlessness—these pleased him better than the birds and insects, whose lives are,

on a simpler scale, and in primitive proportions, ruled by the same needs, and motives even, as our own; better than the emotional, fugitive loveliness of flowers; better than the streams, hurrying so restlessly, persistently towards annihilation in the sea; better than the sea itself, majestic though it is in its mateless, unfruitful immensity and strength.

The effect upon Colthurst of a few seconds' communing with the larches was soothing, and found expression in the more amiable tone he adopted towards Jenny Parris. He imagined her silence to be the result of sulkiness. He was aware of having been somewhat egotistic during their walk together this evening, and of having omitted to pay her words—Colthurst had so far abstained from mere objective testimony to his admiration for her good looks—the amount of personal attention she unquestionably liked.

'Come, Jenny,' he said, presently, 'what is the use of our quarrelling? Let us wait here a little while. There is no hurry, and, at this rate, we shall overtake the others almost directly. You needn't grudge me a few minutes' chat. You will have plenty of Steve Kingdon's society when I am gone—have it for the remainder of your and his natural lives, in fact. A little abstinence now will probably increase your appetite for it. And it is well to begin, at all events, with a large appetite for the inevitable.'

Jenny had turned to him quickly when he began speaking. But now she moved away impatiently towards the rough bridge.

'What is there to be so cross about, after all?' Colt-

hurst continued, following her, his interest in the girl increasing in proportion to her apparent indifference. 'You may just as well behave prettily to me while I am here. You can behave uncommonly prettily, you know, Jenny, when you like. I shall have a dreary enough time of it grinding away at pictures which that great composite idiot, the British Public, hasn't the sense to understand and buy, when I go up to London again. Whereas you have no end of splendours ahead. You'll be thinking of being married, and having a smart house in Yeomouth and coming out as no end of a fine lady, if Steve gets a good berth. Will you ever think of me, I wonder, Jenny? Will you send me an invitation to the wedding?'

'There won't be no wedding,' she answered, tossing up her head. 'Me and Steve's parted. We had words about it to-day. He swears he wouldn't have me now if I kneeled down to ask it of him.'

Colthurst drew in his breath with a queer little hiss.—'Wouldn't he? More fool he,' he said.

Jenny crossed the bridge and leaned her elbows on the top bar of the gate. She was not much given to tears, but at this moment they rushed hot and smarting into her grey eyes. For she was very miserable, poor child, and it was only vanity which kept her from crying. Had not Mr. Colthurst intimated that tears in all probability would be anything but becoming to her?

Colthurst, meanwhile, was considerably startled by the piece of information just conveyed to him. It made a difference in his relation to his companion.

'W-why have you and Steve parted?' he inquired.

The girl hesitated.—'Steve didn't fancy you paintin' me so often.'

'Oh! I am the serpent in paradise, am I?' Colthurst exclaimed. 'Really, Mr. Stephen Kingdon's susceptibilities are remarkably easily aroused.'—He paused; and then said, rather hardly, 'I have never made love to you—honestly now, Jenny—have I?'

'No, never,' she answered, the words, for all her desire not to cry, shaken by a sob. Then Jenny straightened herself up, and broke out stormily—'But they won't believe that. They're, all of mun, always on at me about you—except Dave. Father's always tellin', and then Aunt Sarah Jane, she must go and chime in. She's always been set against Steve and me marryin', and she's pleased enough to take hold of this about you and the paintin'. She's always spying on to me, and publishing tales about my carryin' on till the town rings with 'em.'

Colthurst drew the end of his moustache between his teeth and bit it with a sort of rage. He was immensely annoyed at this revelation of local gossip. He had been very happy—happy, that is, in so far as is possible to a person of his restless, feverish imagination—during his six months' sojourn at Beera Mills. He had gone down there sore from disappointment caused by the rejection of two of his pictures—they sold years afterwards, I remember, for large sums of money—by the Royal Academy. And the shrewd, humorous, handsome fisher-people had been kindly and cordial towards him. Colthurst was very sensible of kindness, not having met with any great superfluity of it so far—by his own fault, in part, no doubt. He

had felt grateful to them. And gratitude had a softening, sweetening influence upon him. He held, too, that his conduct in respect of Jenny Parris had been really irreproachable. He had let her see, no doubt, something of the admiration in which he held her remarkably ripe and vigorous beauty. That had been unavoidable. But a sense of *noblesse oblige* had prevented his indulging in tender passages with her. And now he found himself accused of an ordinary vulgar intrigue! It was immensely annoying. And Colthurst was, possibly, all the more conscious of his own unimpeachable virtue and the odious injustice of the public, because his code of ethics in questions of the affections was not a very stringent one. His personal vanity was somewhat wounded moreover. For he saw he had been mistaken concerning the root of Jenny's ill-temper. It arose not from jealousy, which would have been complimentary; but simply from chagrin at the loss of her old sweetheart.

Colthurst had followed the young woman across the rough bridge. Now he stood a couple of steps behind her, inwardly cursing the censorious impertinence of the inhabitants of Beera Mills.

Finding he did not answer her, Jenny turned away hopelessly, and leaned her elbows on the top of the gate again. Her voice was thick with tears she still struggled not to shed, as she said—

'Oh! it's a poor life for a motherless maid up to our place—always short of money and put to shifts. It was bad enough when half the takin's went in liquor, but we'm worse off than ever now father's gone and got religion like he has. Days and days he

won't put the boat out because he's going flacketting over to Nettlecombe or up to Codd's Camp to preachin's and prayer-meetin's and anniversaries. He says the Lord's given him higher work to do than fishin'. All I know is, the herrin's paid best. And so I'm forced to wear this old gown that's a shame to be seen beside the other maidens'. Fay, what's that?' she cried out, shrilly, reeling back from the gate right against James Colthurst as he stood beside her.

Only a white owl sailing out from among the fragrant larches, beating silently a little way down the road, and then disappearing, with a weird, half-human laugh, into the wood across the glen. The worthy bird was wholly intent on personal matters—probably matters of supper. Like Esau of old, he was in search of savoury meat such as his soul loved—a belated field-mouse, for instance, or some other succulent, defenceless creature in fur or feathers. But we all of us, at times, I suppose—owls included—though, in our own opinion, going very innocently about our private business, appear as the messengers of fate to others, and set in motion those mysterious magnetic currents that determine, for joy or sorrow, the future of other lives. So to half-educated, superstitious Jenny Parris, in the midst of her present excitement and keen self-pity, the greedy, wide-winged barn-owl appeared as she knew not what vision of supernatural terror. And before she could recover herself Colthurst's arms were round her. He had flung them out instinctively to save her from falling.

It was all done in a very brief space of time. Flint struck steel, and the flame leapt up; for, as the young

man felt the girl's heart beat fast under his hand, in the moist dimness of the twilight, with only those few faint stars looking on, the emotional side of his nature, unfortunately made a resistless dash right across the board, and, almost before the cool, calculating side realized what had happened, cried *mate.*

'Jenny, Jenny,' he said, hoarsely, a singular vibration in his voice.

Jenny started, drew back a little, looking him full in the face, her lips parted, and an intense though silent inquiry in her eyes. Still she did not make any effort to shake herself free of his arm.

A long sighing draught of air crept up the valley, cool off the sea, bearing on it the sullen booming of the ground-swell, and the voices of the young men and women, sad and sweet, as they rose once more in the refrain of the old hymn—

> Lord, do not long delay!
> Lord, wipe our tears away.
> Through life's long earthly day
> See how we strive and pray.

And somehow, before the last lingering, plaintive notes died away, Colthurst's and Jenny's lips met. It was not all his doing. Jenny raised her proud head, not unwilling to give as well as to receive that first kiss. Then they moved apart, and stood looking strangely at each other through the colourless dusk.

Colthurst was the first to speak. The emotional side still had the upper hand, and he did not choose his words very wisely.—'Upon my word,' he said, 'I b-believe you have a little liking for me, Jenny, after all.'

'Liking!' she cried, with something between laughter and a sob. 'Why, I'd walk round the world barefoot after to you, Mr. Colthurst; you know it.'

But as it happened the young man had not known it.

'G-good Lord,' he stammered, under his breath.

Putting up his hand and thrusting the fingers inside his turned-down shirt collar, he dragged it outward. It seemed to choke him. He was fairly confounded.

If he had been playing unadvisedly with edged tools, he seemed likely to get cut with a vengeance. For an instant it occurred to him that all this—the lonely walk, the girl's lamentation—was a conspiracy, which had been planned beforehand and carried out by the help of a third person. Colthurst's opinion of the honour of his fellow-creatures was not an exalted one. Most of them were capable, he thought, of exhibiting alarming ingenuity in compassing their own ends. But he rejected this explanation, after momentary reflection, in disgust. These fisher people were unsophisticated, and there was a sturdy independence about them. They were too proud, he believed, to stoop to a dirty trick of that description. Moreover there had been a ring of honesty in poor Jenny's crude declaration of affection that was indisputable.

All these thoughts flashed through Colthurst's brain with amazing rapidity. But to Jenny, in her present condition of unruly excitement, the pause seemed intolerably lengthly.

'You'm playing with me, Mr. Colthurst,' she cried,

her voice quivering with passionate emotion. 'You've been and made me tell. You wouldn't let me be. You knew it well enough all along, but you think it rare fun to bring me down and shame me. I liked Steve well enough till you come, but now I can't bear the sight of him. Why ever did you come here, and tell to me, and make me love you? I'll never be able to hold up my head in Beera again. They'll all sneer and throw it up against me that—that——'

I suppose it was reprehensibly weak of James Colthurst, but Jenny's voice rising in piteous anger and despair was a little more than he could endure.—'Hang it all!' he said, desperately. Then he took the girl in his arms again, and held her.

'Poor, d-dear, beautiful, foolish Jenny,' he said, in that quick, broken, whispering way of his. 'There, kiss me again. D-don't cry so. There, it's all right. I love you. Will that pacify you, Jenny? Upon my word, I love you.'

Chapter IV.

Beera town consists of some forty or fifty slate-roofed, whitewashed houses, clustered together at the lower end of the valley where it opens in a great green V upon the Atlantic. Before you are three thousand miles of ocean, clear and free, so the natives with their little turn for fine phrases tell you, to Labrador. Behind you, working back inland, turning upon itself like some gigantic serpent, is the long wooded combe. A bit of a very primitive world, this. For probably

the distribution of moorland, wood, and water is almost the same now as when the Roman legionaries began constructing the road up above, which runs due west—straight as a bee-line, up hill and down dale—from the pleasant, steep-streeted town of Yeomouth, on the estuary of the tide river, to Buckland Head, the extreme point of the iron-bound coast. The road has a certain dignity and impressiveness about it, though given over in these days chiefly to farmers' and fish-jowders' carts, to carriers' hooded vans, and donkeys labouring under bags of sand or panniers full of herrings. For it shows blanched and yellowish as the coarse grasses of the marsh and bog it here and there crosses, cutting its way across the face of the country fearlessly and relentlessly, unswerving as the forward march of civilisation which it seems to typify.

Beera, however, as has already been shown, lies well off the course of the high road. Forward-marching civilisation, even in its modern form of the ubiquitous tourist, has left the little place fairly unmolested as yet. The first few cottages in the street stand back, each set in a patch of steep garden, bright with the glossy leaves and pink, blue, and lilac heads of hydrangeas, while tall red-stemmed fuchsias, myrtles, and Virginian creeper—at this season of the year all colours from buff to dark crimson—are trained against their white-washed walls. In two or three places are agreeably original linhays or donkey stables—an oblong enclosure of tarred planks, roofed in with a derelict herring boat turned keel upwards. In front of the cottages, the stream brawls along its rocky channel, crossed by half a dozen little bridges, made,

like that in the wood, of purple-grey slabs of slate. At the back of them rises some five hundred feet of rough pasture and common-land, very much set up on end. In places it is broken up into small potato fields, but for the most part retains its original character of sheep-walk and warren.

As you get into the heart of the village the houses gather closer together; until at last they seem to jostle each other, actually to crowd and climb upon each other in their anxiety to witness all that goes forward in the level unpaved space commonly known as The Square. This, indeed, forms the *grande place* of Beera town. It is fronted on the left by the low, dusty building of the flour mill; the great, brown, creaking, dripping wheel of which is turned by a branch of the stream. Towards the sea the exits from the square are twofold. One, a narrow passage between a couple of green-balconied houses, ends in a flight of steps, leading up to a row of tumble-down red cob cottages that cling to the very edge of the cliff some fifty feet above the beach. The other, a slanting rocky road blasted out of the cliff face, protected by a low wall, and supported in places by huge buttresses of masonry, leads down to a limekiln—partially blocking the end of the gulley through which the stream empties itself—and to the small, grey, sickle-shaped pier, which guards the quay pool, and the boats and skiffs moored in it from the fury of the western sea.

Both place and people strike you, at once, as having a curiously foreign aspect. The former closely resembles one of the picturesque and inordinately

smelly fishing villages—Beera, save for an all-pervading odour of herrings in the late autumn, is sweet enough—that nestle at the foot of the Apennines along the beautiful Ligurian coast. The people, however, dark-skinned and black-haired though so many of them are, do not approximate to the soft and too often fleshly Italian type. They have a neatness of make, a keenness and fineness of feature, a native dignity of bearing, a certain hard strain, in short, in their good looks, which differentiates them sensibly from the natives of the Riviera.

I cannot vouch for the truth of the story, but tradition tells how, in the year of grace 1588—when Nature took up her parable against foreign aggression, bidding stars in their courses, wind, wave, and tempest fight against that grim and bloody-minded prince, Philip the Second of Spain, and scatter the wrecks of his Invincible Armada on all the British coasts—a Spanish galleon, driven into Yeomouth Bay by stress of weather, was cast away upon the long reef of black rock that runs out from the back of Beera Quay. Tradition tells, further, how the swarthy southern sailors, worn, storm-tossed and disheartened, made their way up—the few that escaped of them—sadly and humbly into the little, white-walled, English town; and cried to each other, even as the weary seamen of Odysseus cried to each other, resting on the yellow sands of that strange land 'in which it seemed always afternoon'—cried that they would 'return no more;' but forgetting home, and wife, and child, the vineyards and pomegranates, the song and dance, the sunshine, and the cruel tyranny of Spain, they would

stay here for ever in the fair, smiling, tender-hearted West Country.—And so, indeed, like Odysseus' seamen they did stay. But with this slight difference, that whereas the old Greek sailors spent their time sluggardly, lying on beds of 'amaranth and moly,' and muddling their brains with lotus eating, these other castaways spent theirs in the more profitable occupation of catching ling, and cod, and hake, and herring; and in wandering—the younger and more sentimental of them, I suppose—waist-deep in bracken and purple foxgloves on the hillside; or mingling their rich, sonorous, foreign speech with the cry of the plover and laugh of the gulls, and the long-drawn, sibilant murmur of the sea, as they sat on the short turf beneath the white hawthorn thickets in the springtime and talked of the land they would never see again. Tradition adds finally—but then tradition is a suspiciously wide-mouthed gossip—that the dark-browed seamen found favour in the sight of the slim West Country maidens, so that these married them and bore them beautiful wild-eyed children, whose descendants remain at Beera even unto this very day.

This legend, whether true or false, had pleased Colthurst's fancy from the first. It was very present to him now, on the night of Jenny Parris' birthday party at Red Rock Mouth.

The young man still found himself in a rather perturbed state of mind, unable either to draw or to read. So he loitered out from his lodgings at a green-balconied house in the Square, and sat down on the sea-wall guarding the road to the quay. Jenny had gone

home to one of the red cob cottages perched on the edge of the cliff some time ago. And the last of the herring-boats, not without a shouting from the men and splashing of the long sweeps as the wash struck her in rounding the pierhead, had sailed out to take up her place and drift all night with the rest of the fleet dotting the bay. Beera town was silent, having apparently put on its nightcaps, and put out its candles, and retired discreetly to bed. The only sounds were those of the stream rushing down the gulley, and the growling grind of the ground-swell among the loose pebbles of the beach.

Colthurst sat with his back to the sea, staring aimlessly at the wall of rock across the road. He thought of Jenny Parris and of the shipwrecked Spanish sailors, wondering whether the story might not very well be true—whether the girl, indeed, might owe some of her stately beauty and the violence of her emotions alike to this old strain of alien blood. Her lately-declared passion for himself had an exotic flavour; a heat, a suddenness, a dash of reckless romance, very unlike the ordinary orderly, humdrum loves of the ordinary, sober Briton. And this exotic vehemence of Jenny's love piqued and gratified Colthurst. It was distinctly moving and exciting. He wondered how it would end.

Yes, began to wonder that already. For in his present solitude the cool reasonable side of his character soon began to take up the game again. Colthurst was becoming disagreeably aware that he had ended by making a very sufficient fool of himself and talking a large amount of abominable nonsense be-

tween the gate into the wood and the first cottages in Beera Street. And the awkward part of it was that he could not remember exactly what he had said. He honestly wished not to deceive the young woman or wrong her; and in the heat of the moment he might have been betrayed into making her promises it would be impossible to keep. Any person of average sense would know that promises made under such circumstances are subject eventually to very liberal discount. But then there came in the question, was Jenny Parris, in this particular matter, to be reckoned a person of average sense?

Colthurst shifted his position slightly. No doubt it was all very romantic; but, he knew well, it is possible to pay too heavy a price for your romance. Had he not seen more than one young man, in his own profession, whose career had begun with a very fair measure of promise, hopelessly handicapped, condemned to the everlasting production of *potboilers* by an early marriage or less honourable form of entanglement? The situation was as common as lying. But Colthurst was indisposed to take it very seriously. He had been in tight places of the kind more than once before, and had managed to cut a sufficiently direct road out of them.

For as Colthurst had said of himself, he was not soft. He had very definite ambitions, and woe to the person or thing that should come between those ambitions and their fulfilment. He would show himself somewhat remorseless. And this not so much from selfishness as from a profound conviction that he possessed unusual powers, and that he was bound

to give them an expression as complete and unhampered as might be. It has become the fashion to narrow the meaning of the word conscience, and limit its operations to the sphere of practical morality, to the fatal cheapening of all literary and artistic labour. Some excellent persons, indeed, have run a trifle mad on this subject; and have offered the world as a great and precious truth the palpably great confusion, that a good man and a good workman are synonymous. While some others, going even a step further, have added the even more pernicious fallacy that a bad man and a bad workman are equally so. Unhappily things do not move on such simple lines. It would no doubt be infinitely more convenient if they did. Whether James Colthurst was morally conscientious or not the reader is free to decide for himself if patience carries him to the final pages of this little history. But that his artistic conscientiousness was of a rare and noble order I can very confidently affirm. And it was precisely the working of this artistic conscience which made him, as he sat on the sea-wall, the sleeping village above and the sleepless sea below, realize one thing clearly, namely, that in the present state of his fortunes he could not indulge in the expensive luxury of a wife.

As to Jenny's share in the matter, the young man had no great faith in broken hearts. The girl's ardour would cool perceptibly, he fancied, when he had been absent a few weeks. When the excitement of his presence, the excitement of standing for him, of embodying, as she did with such remarkable dramatic instinct, the attitudes and expression demanded by

the subjects of the pictures he had in hand—when this was over, all would be over, he thought, as far as he was concerned.

Colthurst leaned his hand on the top of the wall, and turning half-round, restlessly, looked out to sea. A month or two hence she would probably make it up with her old lover again. Colthurst tried to be cynically amused at the idea. But, in truth, he was not very much amused at it. Like most other persons, he would have preferred both eating his cake and keeping it; have preferred that Jenny should be faithful and yet he remain quite free. The emotional side of his nature had a word to say at this juncture. But he did his best to silence it with a little cheap philosophy. After all there were many Jennys, and more charming women far than poor, half-educated Jenny to be met with up and down the ways of life. He must look to the future to redress the limited indulgences of the present. When he had climbed the tree of fame, he promised himself a generous meal of the peculiarly delicious apples that are reported to ripen on its topmost branches.

Unfortunately, as the majority have discovered in every age, the tree of fame is an inconveniently tall tree; the trunk of it is abominably smooth, too, affording very little foothold to the climber. With all due respect to the young man's talent, it must be owned that his canvasses were not at a premium. And so it happened, that before long, his thoughts wandered away from Jenny Parris, and even from her possible restoration to the arms of Stephen Kingdon, to dwell on certain unsold pictures, and on the

unpardonable density of dealers who had refused, commercially speaking, to have anything to say to them. The said dealers, however, were ready enough with their tongues in the direction of advice—advice as to the high desirability of a radical change in Mr. Colthurst's style and choice of subject.

But Colthurst, as he gazed away to the herring-boats drifting, tiny black specks, far out in the bay, swore to himself he would never change. He would starve rather. He built his work on sure foundations, on certain deep convictions, and to change would be to prostitute his talent. That which he believed, he must speak; that—simply, fearlessly, regardless of unpopularity, regardless of contemptuous or even offensive criticism.

To the presentment of the immediate and actual, as he saw it to-day, Colthurst had dedicated his powers. Perhaps this was in part a revulsion from the narrow Calvinistic creed of his youth,—it's rather blasphemous notion that this world would be such a very much more satisfactory one if it had occurred to the Creator to leave at least half of it out; its fierce refusal to accept the artistic and intellectual inheritance bequeathed to us by centuries of human imagination and labour; its sullen placing of things lovely, lively, agreeable to the senses or wit, within the dreary categories of sin. In his revulsion from all this Colthurst undoubtedly risked losing his sense of proportion and relative value, and becoming an intellectual and moral universalist of a very advanced type.

'There was never any more inception than there is now—
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
There will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.'

These four lines pretty completely summed up the young man's creed at this period. He had come across them a few months back; and in reading them had felt that sudden turn in the blood which, in persons of sensitive organisation, so often accompanies a movement of keen intellectual satisfaction. They appeared to him illuminating in a remarkable degree. He subscribed to them as to some Declaration of Independence and act of emancipation, setting his soul free from all bogeyisms and superstitions, and giving him courage to look the world, as he found it, in the face, with sane, untroubled eyes. They gave the lie to the blighting eschatology that had been the bugbear of his youth. They presented him, to put it rather floridly, with a blank cheque on the universe, assuring him at the same time of the solvency of that magnificent concern and its entire ability to meet any drafts he might elect to make on it. He repeated the lines to himself, now, as he watched the herring-boats, and found in them a source of strong encouragement.

All the light left still hung in the west—a glistening whiteness lying over sea and sky, merging the confines of the one into the other, so that no horizon was perceptible. Owing to the projection of the headland just beyond, the road, the quay, the lime-kilns and the beach below were in deep shadow. Impenetrable obscurity was upon them, veiling and massing into one expanse of flat darkness the forms of all alike.

The result of this distribution of light and shade was an optical illusion, which affected Colthurst's imagination forcibly as soon as he perceived it. For it seemed as though the blackness around and below him was the limit of solid things, as though he was sitting on the extreme verge and looking down over the sheer gigantic walls of the earth as she rolled on through the pale immensity of space.

It was very characteristic of Colthurst's complex temperament that just when he had found stern comfort in the doctrine of immutability—the stability and continuity of phenomena as reason and observation present them to our consciousness—his senses should play this rather grisly trick upon him. He leaned on both hands and gazed into the deep gloom and vast colourless beyond, with a sort of giddy fascination. The little boats might be worlds, too, spinning millions of miles below in the great void. As for the hoarse murmur of the ground-swell, it seemed the voice of enormous air-waves, lapping for ever against the sides of the planet as she sailed that impalpable, shoreless sea.—The whole scene and the effect it produced on him reminded Colthurst of certain terrible impressions of childhood, born of illness and nervous excitability, and in particular of a recurrent dream which for a series of weeks had made night hideous to him. Now, after the lapse of years, the memory of that same dream produced in him strange sensations of mingled awe and attraction. Looking down into the darkness he was aware of an insane longing to drop over the wall and—well,—see what would happen next.

Colthurst distrusted such queer moods when they took possession of him. They alarmed him slightly. He wondered to what they pointed. Nothing was more disagreeable to him than the suspicion they suggested that his brain at moments was not quite steady. In the present case to convince himself beyond question that the world was round after all, and that dropping over the sea-wall would not lead to any interesting excursion through space, but merely to a congeries of painful compound fractures, if not to that permanent and final dislocation of the physical being, commonly known as death—he picked up a stone off the roadway and threw it over into the blackness, listening, as he did so, to hear it strike the ground below with a degree of anxiety which he felt to be absurdly weak-minded.

He waited some seconds, but the stone apparently had not reached the ground. It made no sound. It had, in point of fact, alighted on a heap of wet sand piled up against the side of the lime-kiln. The silence was very distressing to Colthurst. Was the stone falling, falling, still falling, falling everlastingly into the infinite abyss?

Hastily stooping down, he groped with both hands in the roadway again. Found another stone, a large one, raised it with an effort, pitched it over the wall, and listened once more.

This time the stone conducted itself in a reassuringly normal manner. It struck one of the buttresses of masonry with a clang, and then bounding outward, rolled down the beach and into the quay pool with a rattle and splash.

The young man drew himself up quickly, an involuntary exclamation of relief on his lips. His forehead was damp, his heart was thumping against his ribs in a way that made his breath come quite short. Colthurst was ashamed of his agitation. It annoyed him acutely.

'That handsome witch has contrived to turn my head to some purpose to-night,' he said to himself, rather savagely.

Then he moved away with rapid, noiseless footsteps up the road towards the quiet village again. As he did so, a light in the upper window of the last of the old, cob cottages at the edge of the cliff caught his eye. Colthurst was feeling unpleasantly nervous, shaken, and consequently ill-tempered. He stopped a moment.

'Ah, Jenny,' he said, half aloud, 'I am not very grateful to you, after all, for the gift of your heart. You have landed both yourself and me in a deuced awkward position. It won't do. And the sooner I get out of it the better.'

He turned and looked back once more at that ghostly pallor in the west.

'Whatever I may fling myself over walls, or tumble into bottomless pits of nothingness and go to the devil generally for, I can't afford to do it for you,' he added, 'splendid though you are in your way, Jenny Parris.'

Chapter V.

We have just seen how James Colthurst, claiming the free exercise of his individual rights of man, speedily began trying to extricate himself from the difficulty in which his contributory negligence—to use no stronger term—had gone far to place him. Jenny Parris' state of mind is worth passing attention also. For it is universally admitted that to arrive at even an approximately just view of any affair it is necessary to call witnesses on both side, since looks, words, and even actions, have a tiresome habit of lending themselves to almost diametrically opposite interpretations. In one sense, indeed, far from being stubborn, nothing is more elastic than fact. It can, as testimony, be stretched any and every way. And its elasticity is likely, alas! to be tested to the uttermost when the interpreters of it are on one side a man, and on the other a maid.

Jenny Parris, then, according to the manner of the majority of her sex, believing vehemently that which she wished to believe, had gone home to the last of the rickety cottages perched on the cliff, her heart overflowing with joy. Notwithstanding her unruly temper, the girl's disposition was buoyant, hopeful, and loyal. Hers was one of those large, generous natures, which, with an almost unlimited capacity for running their poor heads against stone walls to the great inconvenience of themselves and others, have still an heroic element in them.

Jenny's expression was at once tender and triumphant, as she swung up the rough flight of steps lead-

ing out of the Square. Her love was returned, her vanity satisfied, her wounded pride appeased. She had an agreeable sense that her mouth, like the pious woman, Hannah's, of old, was enlarged over her enemies—that rather too consciously virtuous person, her aunt Sarah Jane Kingdon, at their head. She had accepted unquestioningly Colthurst's faith in his own powers; and vague, but delightful visions of future grandeur, when he should be rich and famous, floated through her brain. She had told him the truth when she declared herself willing to follow him barefoot; but during their walk from the gate up in the combe to the first cottages in the street, the young man's talk had—as he subsequently feared—given her every reason to believe that her devotion was not in the least likely to be put to proof of that kind. And so, naturally enough, Jenny's thoughts turned in the direction of self-glorification. Fancy travels fast under such conditions. When the girl reached the doorway of the cottage and paused a moment on the threshold, unwilling to exchange the freedom and freshness of the evening outside, for the close atmosphere of the kitchen within, she was occupied with vivid pictures of occasional returns to Beera in the future—Beera, humble, teachable, attentive—Beera, round-eyed with wonder at the brilliant fortunes of its once rather despised daughter.

At the further end of the kitchen, a long room, low and narrow as the cabin of a vessel, his face towards the door, sat William Parris studying his open Bible. The aspect of the kitchen was not inviting. The fire had gone out, laving the cooking-stove and the cav-

ernous chimney-place a blot of blackness in the wall on the right, before which in resigned discomfort crouched an old sandy and white cat. Just inside the door on the stone floor lay a great pile of brown and yellow herring-nets, emitting a quite sufficiently perceptible odour of stale fish. The rafters were browned by smoke, and the walls patched with half a dozen different patterns of paper in varying stages of griminess.

These sombre surroundings were a not inappropriate setting to the figure bending over the Bible. Parris was a tall, powerfully-built man, full-lipped like his daughter, but with fairer hair and bluer eyes than hers. If Jenny had any Spanish blood in her veins it must have come from her mother's side of the family.—His curly, grizzled beard, growing high on the cheek, was short and close, showing the line of his jaw. His bullet-shaped head was well set on a hairy, muscular neck, and his features were well distributed. In short, he would have been an unusually handsome man but for a long seamy scar running down from the outer curve of the left eye-socket to the corner of the mouth, that drew the lip up and back, exposing the canine tooth under the edge of his short moustache. This disfigurement, which gave an unpleasant, snarling look to the otherwise fine face, along with a certain disregard of soap and water (against which his daughter protested in vain), made William Parris in his soiled canvas trousers and old blue jerseys a figure, picturesque perhaps, but otherwise doubtfully agreeable.

He was not a very good scholar. And now, as he

sat reading, he followed the words diligently across the page with one blunt forefinger, while with the other hand he shaded the dip candle set in a broken china candlestick on the table before him, so as to concentrate all the feeble light on his book. But probably the very difficulty he experienced in deciphering the contents of the book only stamped its sonorous language more indelibly on his memory.

Bill Parris' system of exegesis was very simple. He drew no distinction between history and parable, between statement of events and symbolic utterance. All to him alike was the Word of the Lord, mystic, sacred, life-giving. No miracle staggered his faith by its improbability, no story of revenge or ruthless war of extermination troubled his moral sense by its brutality. His moral and spiritual digestion, indeed, was not easily deranged. So his mind came to be saturated with Old Testament sentiment—Parris distinctly preferred the revelation of Sinai to that of Calvary—and packed with Old Testament phrases, which in moments of excitement he would pour forth, not without a kind of rude eloquence, in a stream of wild improvisation.

This gift of prophesying was greatly admired by his hearers in the rough-cast little Salems, Bethels, or Providences of Brattleworthy, Codd's Camp, and Nettlecombe. It was popularly reported of him that 'Bill Parris held on to the Lord in prayer most amazin.' The very incomprehensibility and disjointedness of his discourses were regarded as sure proof of their supernatural origin. Scoffers, as we know, offer quite another explanation of such

religious phenomena, and scoffers were to be found even in the nighbourhood of Arcadian Beera. Kent Crookenden, for instance, had taken a lamentably carnal, Gallio-like view of the matter, when old Mr. Hawley, troubled by the emptiness of church and fulness of chapel, had consulted him about it. He declared that, though Parris' strong constitution had otherwise resisted the effects of drink, his brain had not escaped injury, and that he was in the first stage of that common enough form of religious mania, in which seeing visions and hearing voices alternates with fits of brooding melancholy.—'Some day he will go mad enough to be shut up, Hawley,' he had said; 'and then Little Salem will be shut up too, and all your strayed sheep and lambs will come bleating back to you. Probably they will do so before the inspired lobster-catcher reaches the final dangerous or idiotic stage of mental disintegration. For even pious insanity palls after a time; and the Establishment is pre-eminently sane. Don't be afraid. It's a safe fold. Your people will be bored before long, and then they'll hurry home to it.'

To-night it happened that Parris was in a state of exaltation. The spirit of prophecy was upon him. He had been muttering to himself for the last half-hour. Now as Jenny paused in the open doorway, reluctant to exchange her fair dreams for the somewhat repulsive realities of the cottage kitchen, he raised his head, let the hand with which he had shaded the candle fall heavily upon the table, and began to speak.

'Woe to the fulish virgins,' he cried; 'woe to the rebellious daughters. For they assemble of mun to-

gether. They go up along through the streets of the city wi' singin', callin' on to one another—Let us put on our gudely apparel, let us go forth wi' laughter, to the sound o' the tabret an' harp. Let us go up to our high plaices, to the groves an' plaices o' the hill altars wi' feastin', yea, let us feast under the cedar trees, even the gudely cedars o' Libanus.'

Sometimes these outpourings alarmed Jenny. For though she criticised her father with greater freedom than filial piety, she could not entirely shake off a half belief in his inspiration. More often they simply angered her. But to-night, full of her own thoughts, the girl paid little heed to his speech. Reflecting that when the fit was on him it was useless to hope for any rational reply to a question, Jenny remained standing in the doorway till the storm of words should be stilled. She stooped down, now and again, to caress the old sandy and white cat that had hopped across to greet her and was now rubbing against her ankles, purring hoarsely. The poor beast had been caught in a steel trap in the woods and had lost a fore-paw, so its movements were necessarily lop-sided and ungainly. But Jenny, who was always touched by the sight of suffering, only cherished it the more tenderly for its misfortune.

Whether the girl's indifferent attitude annoyed Parris, or whether he had reached the point of exaltation where the mind ceases to be affected by anything outside itself, I cannot say. He may have been prompted by half-conscious malice, or the turn his words took may have been purely accidental. The psychological phenomena presented by persons in his

condition defy strict analysis. But after staring at Jenny for a few moments, he spoke again, his voice rising in tone:—

'Woe to the fulish virgins, I say woe, woe unto mun, for the day o' their tribulation cometh—'e be nigh, yea, 'e shall not tarry. Then shall they cry, but no man shall answer. The ears o' heaven shall be shet against the cryin' of mun. For gudely apparel they mun have filthy rags; for the sound of the tabret and melody mournin' and mighty weepin'. The wine o' their feasts shall be spelled. Yea, it shall run down and the ground shall leck it up, the airth shall open her mouth wide an' swallow it. Destruction shall overtake mun. Then shall they rise up and cry airly in the mornin', and to the goin' down o' the sun shall they continue, because o' the inequity o' their doin's——'

Parris paused, opened his wild, blue eyes wide, fixing them on his daughter, and spread out his large hands as in repudiation. His voice rose almost to a cry.—'But no man shall be found to petty mun,' he said, 'nor to zuccour their fatherless children.'

His action, his last words, startled Jenny into sudden attention. The girl was still a good deal moved and excited. And they seemd to cut across her bright dreams as a scythe cuts through standing grass and flowers, laying them low in an instant.

'Father, father, what be tellin' about?' she cried out, hurriedly.

Parris gazed at her vaguely again. Then his face broke in a smile, that was painfully distorted by the

dragging back of the upper lip. His whole manner, even his accent, changed.

'Who be you?' he asked, with an air of childish curiosity. 'Where do 'e come from?'

'Why, father, are you mazed?' the girl answered. 'Don't you know me? It's me—Jenny. I've been along of Dave and a lot more of 'em picnicking over to Red Rock. Don't you mind it's my birthday?'

'Go along with you! you b'ain't Jenny, though you're a likely maid enough,' he rejoined, with the same snarling smile. 'She's gone up over-stairs to bed wi' her mammy an hour an' more agone.'

He half rose from his chair, straining his eyes as though to see something at a distance, leaning forward and turning out his elbows as he gripped the edge of the table with both hands.—'You'm not alone,' he called out, sharply. 'There be tu of 'e. Who's the man a-looking over your shoulder?'

Jenny wheeled round, catching hold of the jamb of the door to steady herself. Her father's expression and manner scared her, following immediately on his strange speech. Wheeled round with a quick, throbbing hope of finding Colthurst beside her, with a passionate longing, not only for the joy and protection of his presence, but also that he might have come to claim her, here in her own poor home, and by a public avowal of his love set her sudden fears at rest.

Alas! not James Colthurst, but only her brother, David, was there behind her. Unmistakable though his face was in shadow—for, as he half-sat, half-leaned on the palings on the other side of the little paved yard before the cottage, the upper part of his

figure was silhouetted against that weird whiteness hanging in the western sky.

'Ask him if he's going out to-night, Jenny,' the young sailor said, softly, nodding towards the open cottage door.

Poor Jenny suffered a pang of bitter disappointment.

'Come and ask him yourself,' she returned. 'I can't make no sense of him. He's been sittin' there tellin' a lot o' silly nonsense like he was clean out of his head.'

'No, no, you ask him, Jenny,' David repeated. He spoke slowly, and there was a thickness in his utterance. 'I see Robbie Ching go down to Quay just now. He's right under against the lime-kiln, and I'll holler on to him to help put the boat out while I shift my clothes if father'll go. Ask him, there's a good maid.

Jenny hesitated. She was excited, even nervous. For the first time it occurred to her seriously to doubt her father's sanity. And in her present frame of mind she hated the gloomy little kitchen, its smoke-grimed rafters. Then tossing back her head defiantly, and pushing the herring-nets aside impatiently with her foot, she crossed the threshold and went up to the near end of the table.

'Dave wants to know if you'm going out to-night,' she said. 'Most of the boats are out already.'

But Parris had sunk down in his chair again, and the forefinger of his right hand had set off on its slow journey across the page of the Bible.—'The Lord has cast mun out and put mun far from Him. He'll set the feet of mun in slippery plaices, so that they'm

bound to stumble an' fall. Fall, fall, fall,' he repeated, smiling to himself with not precisely apostolic charity. ''Tis written there be fu' that be saved—a blessed Gospel, for I be one o' they fu', praise the Lord!'

Jenny threw up her hands with a gesture of painful helplessness. From the domestic point of view the possession of a private prophet is a doubtful joy, perhaps.

'Father, father, let go your preachin' and wake up,' she cried.

Either the cloud lifted, or Parris elected to descend out of the clouds to the level of ordinary business. Five minutes later he staggered out of the cottage with the great pile of herring-nets across his shoulders.

Then, and not till then, David having performed the operation described as 'hollering on to Robbie Ching,' came indoors; and going into the little, dark, back kitchen proceeded to exchange his smart yachtsman's suit for the miscellaneous garments suited to a long night of shooting and hauling herring-nets, and drifting on the wide, unquiet bosom of the bay.

Jenny paid little enough attention to the black-headed, flannel-shirted young fellow, as he struggled into a much-darned jersey; and, coming back into the kitchen, sat down beside the empty fireplace and began dragging on a great pair of sea boots, reaching half-way up the thigh. She sat with her elbows on the table, resting her head in her hands, pushing her fingers up among the masses of her dark hair. She was very unhappy. Her fair visions seemed to have

fled, vanished, melted before the stern touch of familiar reality—her father, crazy, as she began to think him; his strange talk, with all its sinister suggestions; the ugly, almost squalid home, and its atmosphere, a sickening one to her just now, of poverty and toil. Jenny was, unfortunately for herself, by no means philosophic. Her power of striking an average was limited. She clung in passionate insistence to the thought of Colthurst and his promises; but both he and they seemed cruelly remote and unsubstantial just now. The girl's present unreasoning depression was proportionate to her late unreasoning gladness. Hers was an excessive nature, disorderly in the violence both of its sorrow and its joy.

'Come, Jenny,' David said, presently, bending low and tugging at one of his boots;—his heel had stuck in the hard creases of leather just above the ankle, and it refused stubbornly to go on.—'Hurry up and get the lantern, and the can, and a bit of victual together. We'm so late as never was, already.'

The girl raised her head unwillingly. As she did so, she caught sight, for the first time, of her brother's face.

'Dear heart alive, Dave,' she exclaimed, 'you'm bleeding! Whatever have you done to yourself? You've never been fightin'.'

'Yes, that's exactly what I have been doing,' he answered, coolly. 'And that's why I wouldn't come in. I didn't want father to get askin' questions.'

Jenny looked at him in amazement. Good, steady-going, well-conducted Dave! What was coming next?

'Whatever—' she began. But the young man forestalled her inquiry.

'I may as well tell you about it now, I reckon,' he said. 'All the town'll be ringing with it before morning. And you'd best keep out of Aunt Sarah Jane's way for a bit, for I've been and spoilt Steve's bu-ty for him for the next week.'—Notwithstanding his wounded condition and the awkward stiffness about his mouth, David could not repress a chuckle.—'She's set up a scritchin' like an old hen having her neck wrung when she saw him come in,' he went on. 'She swears she'll have me up afore the magistrates at Yeomouth, though I am own brother's son to her. But I expect Steve won't let her make a silly of herself like that. An' if she does, Parson Crookenden 'll get me off somehow.'

'Whatever did you get fighting Steve for?'

The young man rose and stamped his foot down into the boot.

'To let him know he'd best pick his words a bit when he gets talking about you, Jenny,' he said.

The hot colour rushed into the girl's cheeks, and her eyes blazed.

'And what's he got to say about me?' she demanded.

'Well, he seems to have a good deal more to say than I exactly cared to hear. He was publishin' some fool's tale about what he'd seen, comin' home from Red Rock, of you and Mr. Colthurst sweetheartin'.'

'If he says he seen any harm, he lies,' Jenny burst out, stormily.

'So I told mun,' Dave answered, busy over his boot

once more. 'And to prove it I up and knocked the lies down his throat again.—Qet the things quick, like a good maid. I must go.'

As the young sailor turned out of the cottage into the still autumn night Jenny came close to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. They were a fine couple, the brother and sister, he in his rough, half-savage fishing clothes, she in her scanty grey gown, standing together in the dusk.

'Dave, you'll not let him talk,' she said, with a sort of gentle eagerness. 'You'll stand by me. It's all right between me and Mr. Colthurst. You believe me, Dave, don't you? I tell you it's all right.'

There was a just perceptible pause before he replied, 'It had better be all right, or Mr. Colthurst 'll have to answer for it, gentleman or no gentleman. But I wish you could have fancied one of your own people, Jenny. Beera folk's best. I don't hold with furriners and furrin ways. I hoped maybe you'd take up with Steve again presently when he's mended up a bit, and hasn't got quite so many different colours about his eyes.'

David chuckled once more at the agreeable thought of the highly decorative countenance his cousin would present to society at large on the morrow.—'He'll be a sight and no mistake,' he added, with cheerful conviction. 'Take care of yourself, Jenny.'

And with that he stumbled away over the cobble stones, and down the steep flight of steps as fast as his big boots would allow.

Jenny's sleep was generally profound enough, notwithstanding the heat in summer and cold in winter

of her little room close up under the thatch. The raftered ceiling of it sloped away so sharply that it was only in the centre, under the ridge beam of the gable, that she could stand quite upright. To get the big four-post bed, which formed its chief adornment, into the room at all, it had been necessary to remove the tester bodily. So that the posts, sawn off at half their height, stood up in purposeless, unsightly fashion at the four corners. But neither the poverty of her surroundings, nor the fact that the hardness of the wooden slats of the bedstead was but indifferently disguised by a straw palliasse and very meagre feather bed, usually interfered much with the sweetness of her slumbers.

To-night I suppose, however, she was overtired with her walk, the day's not wholly successful pleasuring and its very varying emotions. For it was not till some time after Colthurst had ended his lonely vigil down on the sea-wall that she could make up her mind to put out the candle. And when at last she did sleep, her sleep was an uneasy one. She turned restlessly from side to side, much to the discomfort of the old sandy cat, curled up on the patchwork quilt against her feet. More than once she started and flung her shapely arms wide across the poor pillow, and moaned as though in pain.—For all the sounds and sighs, the events and imaginings of the last twelve hours came back to her, jumbled together in a phantasmagoria of disconnected yet vivid impressions.—Again, with a sort of ecstasy, she felt Colthurst's kisses on her lips and his arms around her. Again she heard her father's voice rising in stern

warning and bitter denunciation. Again she heard the mocking laughter of the owl. Again she saw little Mary Crookenden's pale face and red eyelids, as the child, in her brilliant orange and scarlet frock, stood in the soft sunset light among the gorse and heather. Jenny heard a shouting too, and saw struggling figures, and then faces—Steve Kingdon's, her brother's, once Colthurst's, and that was worst of all—white, fixed, terrible, and dabbled with blood.

In the grey of the morning the girl got up and opened the small casement window. Above on the uplands the day broke fresh and fair enough. But down here in Beera town all was dim and still as death. The edges of the thatch above, and the straggling rose spray trained up beside the window, were furred with innumerable tiny drops of wet. While in the windless calm, the sea fog, warm, moist and ghostly, crept up stealthily, a formless, stifling greyness, over the little whitewashed village, and into the long tortuous windings of the wooded combe.

I must remind the reader that all this took place in easy-going, old Parson Hawley's time, long before Cyprian Aldham became vicar, and the sun of modern High Anglicanism arose on the benighted West Country parish of Beera Mills.

BOOK II.—MISS MARY CROOKENDEN.

'It is worth the labour to consider well of Love, whether it be a God, or a Devil, or a passion of the mind, or partly God, partly Devil, partly passion.'—PLOTINUS.

CHAPTER I.

ALL the critics were in a flurry. They cackled up and down the columns of the newspapers and pages of the magazines like a pullet who has laid her first egg on a frosty day in December. And, yet in point of fact, none of them had laid an egg; but had only found one,—which, with all deference to the talent of critics and high functions of criticism, is quite another matter.

Still they cackled, and rightly. For it was a new sort of egg, an unexpected egg; and their smartness, and knowledge of the world, and literary gifts, and artistic acumen, notwithstanding, they were really at a loss to determine what kind of living creature might be inside it. One section of them, the younger, more progressive, and daring, declared that it undoubtedly contained an eagle, destined to soar away up into the empyrean in most majestic fashion, till it stared, undismayed and unblinking in the face of the sun himself, carrying the future of the British art—as the Roc did Sinbad the sailor—aloft on its back. All of which modest little phrases read very well in print,

when developed and enlarged on, and interspersed with allusions to Naturalism and Democracy, to 'the lifting of the veil of Isis,' to Maia, and the Modern Idea. Another section, the older and more conservative this one, took, as in duty bound—after reading the lucubrations of their contemporaries—a diametrically opposite view. They asserted that the egg in question was laid by no fowl that ever yet wore feathers, by no bird, whether of prey or innocently domestic; but that its origin was reptilian. In their minds there could be no question about it. They therefore called on respectable persons, in the name of all they held dearest,—prejudice, pocket, wife, child, hearth, country, not to mention the eternal salvation of their own artistic souls—to rally like one man, and leap upon that egg and the horrid possibilities as yet lying hid within it. To trample under foot, and generally murder and demolish it. While a third section, and this the largest—since the wisdom of unbelief commends itself by being a pre-eminently easy and cheap form of wisdom—elected to swear that there was no egg; or that, admitting an egg existed, it was of the sort commonly found in mare's nests, which sort is invariably addled, as every one knows; and that, consequently, it was equally silly and superfluous to make any fuss at all about it. And like most persons who take up a superior position and entreat others to be calm and not make a noise, the noise which these preachers of common-sense and moderation made themselves was quite the most persistent of any. For, it is impossible not to notice, that of all cackles over public matters, whether

great or small, none is ever so pertinacious and prolonged as the contemptuous and negative cackle.

And, meanwhile, before the source and subject of this hubbub—a picture hung on the line in the large room of the Royal Academy—a crowd had gathered, and shifted, and broken, and passed, only to gather again—had chattered, and stared, and cheerfully pronounced judgment in less than three minutes upon work which had taken the artist months, possibly years, to execute—during six days out of every seven, continuously, through May and June, and on to the hot, moist morning at the close of July, when it is our purpose—after the lapse of ten years of silence—once again to pick up the scattered threads of our history.

But of the picture itself, it is necessary to say a few words first. Under a sky of closely-packed cloud you looked straight down a field-lane, deep in slimy cart-ruts and cattle tracks brimming with water, to a space of dim moorland. This dipped towards a black peat bog in the hollow; while the rise on the right was crowned by a little, huddled, grey homestead, the rafters of its dismantled barn showing skeleton-like against the sky. Across the bog, the gorse and sedges were burning, smouldering sullenly, sending up pale jets of smoke, which, as the wind caught and beat them down again, trailed away over the rusty face of the moor in long lines. The whole was backed, save where the farm-buildings rose against the horizon, by a purple-brown gloom of low-lying winter woods.

On either side the lane were crumbling earth banks, riddled in places by cavernous rabbit burrows. One

was topped by a straggling hedge of oak and beech, to the lower twigs of which the leaves still clung thickly—the faded reds and browns of them being reflected in the shuddering surface of the muddy pools below. Opening on to this uninviting roadway a dilapidated five-barred gate, the spars of it splintered and broken, the rickety posts bleached by lichens and rot; and leaning on the top bar of it, his back towards you, a tall, high-shouldered man.

The painter had certainly not been guilty of any weak concession to the popular demand for what is superficially pleasant, graceful, picturesque. For the man's figure was, both in costume and attitude, uncompromisingly probable, in a sense common-place. He wore a rough check shooting-coat that had seen a good deal of service. The pockets of it bulged. It hung loose and wrinkled below the shoulders as the wearer leaned his elbows on the gate. Of his face nothing was visible save the line of a low brow, of a deep-cut eye socket, high cheek-bone and heavy jaw, under a shock of reddish-brown hair. The presentment was simple enough. But there was a certain energy, almost fierceness in it. The man was strong, still you knew from the slouch of the whole figure he was tired. He leaned heavily. He was absorbed, too; absolutely indifferent to effect. You found yourself wishing he would turn round. For you wanted to know more—to learn the secret, the purpose, to read the past and forecast the future of that averted face.

On the other side of the gate, some dozen paces down the lane, stood another figure. That of a young

woman. She had paused; suddenly, as it appeared, turned round, looked back. She held herself perfectly erect, her head thrown up, her lips parted in laughter. Her left hand was raised pushing back the loose coils of hair which spread, a dark cloud, above the rounded sweep of cheek and chin. The other was extended as in invitation; while the wind, taking the skirt of her simple, grey-winsey dress and blowing it closely against her, revealed the fine curves of her form from waist to knee and knee to ankle. —An ideal woman of the people, primitive, vigorous, deep-chested, well-set on her feet, nothing feeble nor *mesquine* about her; fitted to be the mother of healthy, handsome, firm-limbed children.

Backed by that desolate landscape, balanced by the somewhat sinister presence of her companion, the rich, youthful gladness and promise of her personality seemed to show out as radiantly as the living reds of lip and cheek showed out from the sombre tones of cloud and moorland, from the mournful vagueness of the trailing smoke, and the glistering pallor of the foul lane. Yet looking closer, you perceived, for all her laughter, the woman was not wholly glad. Anxious in the midst of its gaiety, a strange force of appeal in the grey eyes, her countenance was a triumph of conflicting emotions,—its hopefulness weighted by an almost desperate question, its happiness shadowed by an almost tragic doubt,—as she turned with that motion of invitation to the man behind her, and looked him full, daringly, fearingly, in the face.

The name of the picture was hackneyed. It made

no attempt at originality. Possibly the painter had learnt the useful lesson that *les verites betes* are, after all, *les verites vraies;* and consequently had considered it superfluous to exercise his wits in the production of a new and startling title. He had christened his work 'The Road to Ruin' without apology or explanation, and left the public to take exception at the familiar phrase if it pleased. Though, judging by the interest it was now exciting, his muddy field-lane seemed likely to prove, in his own case, no pathway of disaster, but rather—conservative or sceptical tempered critics notwithstanding—the highway to a great and notable success.

Chapter II.

It was still early and the galleries were still fairly empty, when Cyprian Aldham entered the large room on the July morning in question; and paused, catalogue in hand, looking about him with that fine flavor of reserve, of slight superiority, in his bearing and expression, which his friends commended as so well-bred, and those whom he did not honour with his friendship sometimes condemned as so impertinent.

The fact that he was vicar of a remote West Country parish—that of Beera Mills—appeared to Mr. Aldham no sufficient reason for being out of touch with the affairs of the day. On the contrary, he rather plumed himself upon maintaining a close acquaintanceship with 'all that is going on,' as the

phrase runs. He had not any intention of being left behind in respect of social or artistic, any more than in respect of religious developments. It would have appeared to him highly unsuitable that he should be left behind. For this young clergyman, though a charming and graceful person, was possessed of a very strong sense of all that was due to Cyprian Aldham both from the world at large and from Cyprian Aldham himself. He took himself quite seriously. Perhaps he never quite forgot that his cousin Sir Reginald Aldham being childless, he stood next in succession to that gentleman's baronetcy and delightful place in Midlandshire. Not that he was, for a moment, inclined to dilate on his prospective good fortune, or inform any one about it who might be reprehensibly ignorant of it already. To do so would have seemed to him contemptibly undignified. For the proudest pride of all is unquestionably that which takes its own grandeurs so absolutely for granted, that it holds it is altogether superfluous to call the attention of others to the fact of their existence.

I have described the young man as graceful. Some enthusiastic souls were disposed to go much further, and pronounce him a miracle of refined good looks. As a boy, indeed, before his features had hardened and the bone of his face become so marked, with his golden-brown hair standing out like the aureole of some transfigured saint, Cyprian's appearance had been exquisitely, almost absurdly, angelic. His hair was reduced to less celestial proportions now; while the beauty of his mouth was marred by an habitual compression of the lips, as of one upon whom the

order of things wherein he is compelled to exist continually inflicts small shocks of disgust.

Mr. Aldham affected a slight negligence in dress, wearing the inevitable broad-brimmed felt hat and clerical coat until the original black of them had grown greenish from long service. On the other hand, his linen was of the finest and whitest. He eschewed meat, eating only eggs or salt fish on a Friday. But the table-cloth must be spotless under the delicate china on which they were served; while a wide-eyed, wondering Madonna of the modern pre-Raphaelite school gazed down from the wall at the sparely furnished table. All of which may sound over fastidious, finicking almost. Yet no one coming personally in contact with Mr. Aldham would have ventured to apply the latter term to him, I think. For the young man's delicate nature had an edge to it, and that a finely tempered one. It could cut.

On the present occasion, as he paused surveying the gallery, his manner suddenly suffered a change. His light blue eyes lost their vaguely supercilious expression. A certain eagerness seemed to push up through his reserve.

For just opposite, in the crowd gathered before the popular picture, he perceived a familiar figure—a young man like Saul the son of Kish, a head and shoulders above his fellows. Lancelot Crookenden's height, and make, the large serenity of his back, were quite unmistakable. But Aldham was intimately acquainted with this young gentleman's tastes; for had he not, now about five years ago, at the earnest request of the boy's guardian and his mother, turned

'bear-leader,' and gone round the world with him, in the interval which elapsed between his leaving Eton and going up to Cambridge? Lancelot had got into no scrapes. Had caused very little anxiety or trouble; save on the fine summer's morning when he had walked off by himself from the hotel, and amused himself by swimming the Niagara river just below the rapids, thereby giving his tutor-companion a very evil quarter of an hour. Through high and low latitudes alike, the boy had passed carrying his own sweet-tempered, unvexed and not superabundantly intelligent, British atmosphere along with him. He had regarded India as an awfully jolly place where you shot tigers, and stuck pigs, and played polo; and Canada as an even jollier place, because it wasn't so fearfully hot, you know, where you had unlimited sleighing and skating, and where you could tramp any number of miles on snow-shoes after problematical big game. Had looked at all mountains principally with a view to climbing them; at rivers with a view to fishing them; at plains with a view to riding across them; at forests with a view to hunting something in them; at cities, however architecturally magnificent or historically interesting, principally with a view to leaving them; at society, tempted all the world over to smile graciously upon so rich and kindly and well-favoured a youth, with a view, civilly but decidedly, to avoiding it as much as possible.

Cyprian had really grown very fond of the boy; but it was impossible to pretend that the note of culture was conspicuous in him. And it was, therefore,

not without a movement of considerable curiosity that he crossed the room and addressed him now.

'This is surprising,' he said. 'You are one of the last persons I should have thought to find diligently studying pictures at half-past ten in the morning.'

'Oh! I say, Aldham, how awfully fortunate to run across you like this. I didn't know you'd come up yet. My mother was calling in Lancaster Gate the other day, and Lady Aldham told her you were coming for a night or two on your way through to Paris.'

Lancelot backed out of the crowd as he spoke, and stood in the vacant space before a large leather-covered settee. He beamed. There was really something very engaging about this young giant of four and twenty with the smooth sunburnt face, and quiet, candid eyes and brow. He had an admiration amounting almost to reverence for his former travelling-companion; and he made no attempt to disguise it. Lancelot was quite unaffected, undiplomatic, foolishly sincere.

'It's awfully fortunate,' he repeated—'I mean meeting you like this. And how's the dear old West Country looking?'

'The dear old West Country is looking extremely like an immense green sponge,' Aldham answered, smiling in his cool, thin way.

The cordiality of the young man's greeting pleased him. Not only did it minister to his little conceit of himself; but it tended to relieve his mind of a certain uncomfortable suspicion which had proved somewhat troublesome to him during the last few months.

'The rain has been incessant. My books were becoming mouldy. I was becoming rheumatic, so I hastened my journey by a few days. Moreover I wished to see the exhibitions before they closed. You are not here by yourself?' he added, after a moment's pause.

'Yes, I am,' Lancelot replied.

Mr. Aldham's sense of pleasure was intensified. He even went so far as to be slightly annoyed with himself for having ever entertained the suspicion which had troubled him. He told himself he had always really known that suspicion to be absurd.

'What has brought you here all alone?' he asked, smiling again. 'Surely this is quite a new departure on your part. I thought you eschewed all artistic shows; and had an uncivilized disposition to resolve pictures into their original elements—so many yards of canvas, so many shillingsworth of pigments, oil, turpentine, and other unsavourinesses.'

Lancelot waited before answering—he was usually somewhat slow of speech—gazing down, meanwhile, at a long perspective of trouser, ending in white spatts, and the toes of a very neat pair of boots from Peels'.

'Well, I don't care very much about pictures,' he said, at last. 'And that's just the bother, you know. Other people do care for them, and I suppose I don't like to find myself out of it.'

'And so you are trying to find your way into it, so to speak, by means of a solitary tour of inspection this morning. That is a practical way of meeting a difficulty. Does the attempt seem likely to prove successful?'

The young man shook his head gently in reply.—'I'm afraid I'm awfully dense, do you know, Aldham,' he said. 'I've never troubled myself much about pictures and things of that kind before, you see. They never seemed to matter much. But lately I've seemed to see it all in a different light. I—well, I'm afraid I'm a dolt.'

Lancelot contemplated his immaculate spatts once more.—'It's an awful nuisance,' he said quietly; and there was a singular ring of emotion in his voice.

To Cyprian Aldham this outburst of confidence, this confession of ineptitude and inadequacy on the part of so conspicuously well-to-do a person appeared both amusing and pathetic. It was refreshingly naif. But it tended to reawaken those suspicions so recently laid to rest. He looked curiously at the goodly youth for a few seconds. He would have been glad to ask him one simple question. He could have put it in a very few words. But, happily, in the interests of patience and good manners, such simple questions are just the most impossible to ask; and Mr. Aldham's manners were above reproach. Therefore, he abstained from asking any question, and merely said, pleasantly yet with, perhaps, a faint flavour of patronage,—'Believe me, you are very far from being a dolt. If you seriously wish to acquaint yourself with any matter, I do not think want of capacity will stand in your way.'

'Don't you think so?' Lancelot inquired. 'I'm awfully glad of that. I was beginning to be afraid I was only fit for a keeper, or a professional cricketer,

or a bruiser, perhaps. Of course it doesn't much matter what I am fit for. There are loads of fellows who've got plenty of brains, and if I'm not among them the loss is mine—that's all. Only somehow it's made me rather low just lately. Of course it doesn't really matter, only it's nice to know you don't think —oh! well, please, Aldham, we won't say any more about it. Look here, come and enlighten me about these pictures. You understand all about them. They say this one's awfully fine—"The Road to Ruin," you know, by that new man everybody's talking about.'

And Lancelot walked resolutely up to the little crowd again, and edged his way in, with a large gentleness that was very irresistible morally as well as physically, till he stood right before the picture.

Aldham followed in his wake, his curiosity by no means lessened, nor his fears allayed by this abrupt ending to the conversation. But once in front of the picture, his thoughts were directed into another channel. He was sensible of receiving a shock of surprise. The sad landscape reminded him forcibly of outlying parts of his own parish of Beera Mills. The westerly wind, keen and salt off the Atlantic, seemed to cry, with impatient rustle, through those nipped, distorted oaks and beeches, and sweep away drearily over the waste beyond. Aldham was a little short-sighted. He bent forward to examine the two figures in the foreground with a sense of expectation. He almost fancied he should recognise them as acquaintances. He looked at them long and carefully. He was not easily stirred; but the woman's laughing, pleading,

fearfully questioning face moved him strangely, although it proved unknown to him.

'Ah! this man Colthurst can paint,' he exclaimed involuntarily, turning to Lancelot.

'Yes, I know. At least, so everybody says.'

'This is fine,' Aldham added; 'very fine, and remarkably unpleasant.'

But the young man was not attending. An idea had suddenly occurred to him.

'I say, doesn't it strike you that lane and the whole place is as like as two peas to the turn down to Slat Moor, on Withacott's farm, you remember, before we had it drained and put up the new gates? "Road to Ruin." I should just think it was, if the fellow expects to get a living out of that land. Poor old Jeffery found it so fast enough; he died owing the best part of ten years' rent. I'm glad to think there's nothing as bad as that on the estate now. You might flush a woodcock down there, eh! Aldham; but there's precious little else you'd get off that bit of country.'

Cyprian paused before answering. He had lately expressed an encouraging opinion as to his former pupil's abilities. But really he began to fear his encouragement had been a trifle premature. The excellent youth must be amazingly innocent or lamentably superficial.

'I am afraid it represents more than a question of farming,' he said.—The crowd had broken and passed for the moment, and the two very dissimilar young men stood alone before the popular picture.—'I am afraid it represents the first act of a drama which

no draining of land, putting up of new gates, remission of rents, or other mitigation of agricultural depression will prevent being recurrently played out, as long as there are men and women in this wicked world to play it.'

Lancelot looked hard at the speaker and then at the painting. 'Oh! I see.'—He flushed through all his sunburn.—'I'm glad Polly wouldn't come this morning, after all,' he added in a low voice.

The sharp edge of Mr. Aldham's nature showed itself, just then, in the glance he turned upon the young man beside him. 'Miss Crookenden——' he began. But Lancelot did not, or would not hear him.

'They say it's sold for a cool thousand,' he remarked.

Aldham was annoyed. It had never occurred to him before that this boy would venture to do anything so very like snubbing him. Then, moreover, he began to fear his suspicions were justified, that they were most provokingly far away from an absurdity. Involuntarily he indulged in one of those rather worldly calculations, which the mind carries through so rapidly, that the conscience has not time to protest against them before they are an accomplished fact. Instinctively he set the sober dignities of Aldham Revel against the Slerracombe property; the long pedigree of the fine, old, Midlandshire family, against the few generations of that of the Bristol merchant. He discounted the advantages of the Combmartin connection by certain by no means aristocratically despicable cousinships on his own mother's side.

Finally he weighed his attainments, his scholarship, and knowledge of the world, against the modest acquirements of the handsome, simple, young Dives standing by him. Before conscience could intervene with a comment on the slight unworthiness of this proceeding, the calculation was not only made, but the satisfaction flowing from it was already comforting and appeasing Cyprian Aldham. The sharp edge of his nature was sheathed within the scabbard of his delicate manner again. For no doubt remained in his mind which scale, in this little process of weighing, kicked the beam.

'A thousand? Hardly such a sum as that, I imagine,' he said suavely, in response to Lancelot's last remark. 'Halve it and you will probably be much nearer the mark.'—Aldham turned over the leaves of his catalogue rather absently.—'I am glad to have seen it,' he continued. 'I was curious to arrive at conclusions regarding it for myself, after reading the widely divergent criticisms it has called forth. And I see it is very remarkable. Whether you like the spirit of it or not the picture is undeniably a great one.'

'I suppose it is,' Lancelot rejoined, the flush still remaining on his smooth skin. 'But I don't like it. I tell you what, Aldham, if it means all you say it does, it seems to me most awkwardly like selling a woman's honour. Any fellow who could spend months—I suppose it takes months—in painting such a thing, thinking about it all the while, knowing all he meant by it, and then go and take money for it, must be awfully cold-blooded. I hope I shan't run

across this Mr. Colthurst. I shouldn't care to have to shake hands with him.'

By common consent the two men sauntered on, making place for another batch of spectators.

'If it means all that,' Lancelot repeated, 'he must be a blackguard, to my thinking, or a brute.'

Why is it that the virtues of our friends, specially when those friends are our juniors, do not invariably give us unmixed joy? Cyprian Aldham was a high-minded and pure-lived man, he was moreover, by profession, a preacher of righteousness; yet instead of hailing the righteousness of this ardent young moralist enthusiastically, and patting it, in cordial admiration, upon the back, he was irritated by it. It appeared to him rather excessive, out of place. His smile was decidedly chilly and his tone of patronage marked, as he said:—

'Really I cannot admit poor Mr. Colthurst's brutality follows as a matter of course. Yours is a very destructive line of criticism. If it is the true one we should be compelled to rule out some of the finest works of literature and art. But I think you probably hardly realize how much you demand that we should part with in our respect for womanhood in the abstract, Lancelot. This is a question which cannot be settled off-hand and in obedience of personal feeling. Fundamentally your demand may be a noble one. But a free response to it must unquestionably leave us poorer by the loss of much which is not only of high esthetic interest and value, but of high moral value likewise.'

'I don't pretend to know anything about that,'

Lancelot said quietly, standing very large, hot, and stiff, in the middle of the room. 'All I know is if you've ever cared for one woman, it makes you care about what you call womanhood in the abstract too, somehow. A wrong done, or going to be done, to any woman, seems, in a way, like a wrong to her—and—and—well, you want to go and punch the brute's head who's done it—that's all.'

Aldham looked curiously at the young man. He laughed a little, presumably at the grammar which, in the struggle to express his thoughts poor Lancelot had let go so very far astray.

'You take the matter with a really embarrassing degree of seriousness,' he said. 'You are a critic armed with a bludgeon. I am very far from underrating the moral question involved; but I think your chivalry makes you exaggerate the offence of the artist to an unwarrantable extent.'

'Well, I don't like it. I didn't like that other picture, in the first room, you know, by this man Colthurst—"The Evening of Labour." But this settles it. Let's look at something else, please. What awfully queer things people do seem to admire.'

Half an hour later, as they passed the turnstile, and passed down the matted stairs to the entrance, Lancelot referred to the picture again. It appeared to have taken singular hold on his imagination.

'I wish that landscape wasn't so like Slatmoor. Colthurst'—he repeated—'Colthurst, I'm sure I've heard the name somewhere. Not lately, I don't mean. It's in everybody's mouth now. But long ago—and I can't for the life of me remember what I

associate it with! I say, Aldham, you'll come back to luncheon, won't you? My mother's always only too delighted to see you, you know.'

Chapter III.

Mr. Aldham accepted the invitation to luncheon. As to food, it was an admirable luncheon. But our young clergyman was laudably indifferent to what are euphemistically known as the pleasures of the table. And otherwise the luncheon was a distinctly dull one. Passing years had not lessened Mrs. Crookenden's tribal egotism, weakened her little prejudices, or increased her limited gift of sympathy. Her two daughters, Adela and Carrie, who had now exchanged the schoolroom and brown holland frocks for a well-grown and buxom young womanhood, were not distinguished for sustained power or variety of topics in conversation. They were estimable girls, but both their minds and bodies moved slowly. They had excellent digestions. They were very industrious. They did an immense amount of needlework. They subscribed to a couple of well-known circulating libraries, and read an immense number of books. By the needlework the poor of Slerracombe and of a certain London parish did profit appreciably. By the books they did not themselves, however, profit in any appreciable degree. They never skipped. They read each and every book through from beginning to end. Then, and then only, they felt that they could conscientiously state that they had read it. And the

scendental for immediate and mundane satisfactions. Mr. Aldham's lips were a good deal compressed and his expression was decidedly severe as he passed through the hall of the house in Eccleston Square.

The dining-room door stood open, and within he caught sight of the unmistakable form of Mary Crookenden's old Mulatto nurse, and heard her broken, gutteral tones mingling queerly with the staccato of Mrs. Gregory, his aunt's invaluable housekeeper. Mrs. Chloe had remained faithful to some of the customs of the far-away southern plantation on which her youth had been passed. Even in the height of the London season she stoutly refused other headgear than a crimson and gold silk handkerchief, twisted into a turban-like cap over her tight-curling, grey hair. As this dab of gay colour caught the young man's eye he was aware of a curious leap of his pulse, which had nothing in the world to do either with things diplomatic or things eternal and transcendental. It annoyed him, and yet, dear me, how delicious it was! He ran upstairs. And then, irritated at his own impetuosity and the character of the emotion that generated it, he waited a few seconds on the landing, before entering the drawing-room.

The scene presented to him was a graceful one. Mary Crookenden had just risen to go. She stood in the archway connecting the two light-coloured, fresh-looking rooms. Her hand rested in that of the pretty, little, old lady her hostess, and as she looked down at the latter there was a soft, shining brightness in her lovely eyes. Miss Crookenden dressed extremely well

in these days—almost unnecessarily well, her aunt Caroline thought. Yet that lady, with the best will in the world—best though unconscious—to pick holes, found it impossible to prefer her old charge of vulgarity against her niece's appearance. Miss Crookenden carefully eschewed what was startling. A *genre tapageur* was by no means to her taste. But she liked to be exquisite. And after all, why should not a young lady of fortune, with no very serious duties to engage her attention, apply her mind to being exquisite? Nature had given her a pretty broad hint in that direction by endowing her with so charming a face and figure. She merely took the hint. That was all.

On the present occasion she was arrayed in a dress of the palest and softest blue and white muslin—an elaborate construction of flounces and draperies, diversified by lace and ingenious loops and knots of ribbon. Her hat was adorned with more loops and knots, as was the top of her lace parasol. The dressmaker who had confected this diaphanous costume must have been a true artist in her way. The highest art, we know, reproduces the effect of nature, on the principle of the meeting of extremes. She had, apparently, pressed summer clouds into her service, and had cut yards off the blue sky, where it grows frail against the horizon, to produce suitable clothing for her customer. Miss Crookenden's appearance, indeed, was altogether ethereal, for she belonged to that rare type of fair women who—if the poor little adjective had not been so hard-worked of late years that one fights rather shy of using it—are best de-

scribed as dusky blondes. Her hair had the shaded brightness about it which the French call *blond cendré*. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were dark; while her skin was of the peculiar warm, waxen whiteness you see in the petals of some flowers, notably in fresh magnolia blossoms. If Kent Crookenden prophesied that his little niece would grow into a remarkably pretty person, his prophecy had found generous fulfilment.

At eighteen, upon the death of her father, the young girl had practically become her own mistress. Her uncle, it is true, exercised nominal authority over her. But the Rector was not a stern disciplinarian, particularly where Mary was concerned. And Madame Jacobini—who has already been mentioned as a distant cousin of the Crookendens, more distinguished for the romantic aspects of her marriage than its social and material advantages—who for some years had acted as companion to her young kinswoman, found it undesirable, sweet though the girl's nature was, to hold her with a tight rein.

Mary had a good two thousand a year. She had an extremely decorative little house in St. George's Road, the front of it painted pale blue in this period. She had a certain originality of speech and manner that marked her out definitely from most of the young girls about her, and a gift for drawing and painting which raised her performances considerably above those of the average amateur. In short, Miss Crookenden had a position and a reputation. Perhaps she was disposed to reckon both more highly than they deserved. Many of us are inclined to fall

into the mistake of measuring our importance, not by the magnitude of our attainments, so much as by the limited area of the stage on which they are displayed. Mary Crookenden was queen of a small country. And I fear that the fact of her royal prerogative, rather than narrow boundaries of her dominions, was oftenest present to her thoughts. But on the present occasion it was certainly Miss Crookenden's obvious excellencies, not her possible defects, which impressed Cyprian Aldham as she greeted him smilingly.

'You are here at last,' she said. 'We have been sitting on the edges of our chairs for a good half-hour expecting you.'

'Yes, dear child, I am afraid I have delayed her,' broke in Miss Harriet, in her little, coaxing, explanatory manner. 'She is on her way to some great afternoon party, but I begged her to wait. I so wanted you just to see her.'

Miss Aldham had been pretty at seventeen, she was still very pretty at over seventy, as she stood holding the young girl's hand caressingly and looking up with timid, short-sighted eyes, at the tall young clergyman. She idolised her nephew. Nothing, in her opinion, could possibly be too good for him; and his presence filled not only her gentle breast, but her sweet, faded countenance with a sort of tremulous rapture.

'Am I such a very fine sight, then, dear Miss Harriet?' Mary Crookenden asked, gaily.

'You are one of the sights I love best to see,' the old lady answered.

The grave, full tones of Miss Crookenden's voice

gave a remarkable touch of dignity to her most playful, and even daring little speeches. She was, indeed, a rather confusing young lady to deal with. Her small audacities sometimes tempted the unwary to make advances which they subsequently had cause to regret. It was unwise to take too great advantage of Miss Crookenden's graciousness. You frequently got a snub for your pains. Cyprian Aldham was by no means given to indiscreet advances, so he fared very well, as a rule, at the young lady's hands. She turned to him now with that soft shining still in her eyes. And it must be conceded that he found her absolutely enchanting.

'You are to be congratulated,' she said. 'You are very fortunate. You certainly possess the most delightful aunt in the world.'

Aldham bowed—'I know it,' he replied.

'My dear, my dear,' remonstrated the old lady, gently,—'you both think much too highly of me. It is very kind of you; but I have never been considered at all a clever person.'

'Clever! why you have the most charming cleverness that exists,' Mary said—'the cleverness of making one feel as good as gold, pleased with oneself and everybody else. I was very cross when I came here. I was annoyed at having to go to Lady Combmartin's. I thought she had been impertinent, and I intended to tell her so. She has asked me and has not asked Madame Jacobini, and—'

'My dear, you are not going alone.'—Miss Harriet interposed this assertion or inquiry—it partook of the nature of both—in tones of modest horror. The

habits of modern young women were as incomprehensible as they were alarming to her.

'Oh! no, Chloe will take me there. And Lancelot promised to look out for me, and place me in safety under Aunt Caroline's wing. Aunt Caroline's wing is the most unexceptionably correct of wings, you know.'

'Then, my dear, you ought to go. I ought not to keep you any longer. Mr. Crookenden will get tired of waiting.'

Mary looked down at her hostess' hand as it lay in hers encased in a fine, open-work, silk mitten, and stroked it tenderly.

'Yes, I ought to go,' she answered. 'Lancelot is admirably patient. He has never got tired of waiting yet, and this is by no means the first time I have kept him waiting. But it is hardly fair, is it, to trade upon his virtues?'

'And Lancelot's patience has had a rather heavy strain put upon it to-day, already,' Cyprian Aldham remarked.—He spoke with a slight constraint, not quite naturally or easily.

'Oh! he went to the Academy, after all, then; and you met him there! Poor dear Lance, I wonder what he thought of it all!'

'His criticisms were original; but they were very much to his credit from the ethical point of view,' Aldham said, rather incisively.

'Oh! they are safe to be that,' the girl rejoined, lightly. Then she bent her pretty head and kissed her hostess. 'Good-bye, dear Miss Harriet,' she went on. 'I really ought to go. It is a great pity. I would so much rather stay here with you, and hear about

Lance in his character of art-critic. And then I wanted to hear something about Uncle Kent too. He doesn't write very often. Have you seen him lately, Mr. Aldham? Do you know if he means to come up to London before we all go abroad? How I wish he could be persuaded to go with us.'

Cyprian replied that he had been at Brattleworthy at the end of the previous week, and that the Rector had expressed no intention of coming to London. In fact a journey of any description seemed as remote from his thoughts as could well be.

'He had just got some fresh books on his favourite subject of primitive marriage. He informed me that they contained many new and interesting facts. I do not think there is any prospect of his leaving home at present.'

Miss Crookenden's face clouded slightly.—'He sticks at Brattleworthy in the most hopeless way now,' she said. 'And I'm sure it cannot be good for him. He tells me he cannot afford holidays—why, I can't imagine. He says he has had no losses, and I have always understood he was very well off. But he seems to have developed a perfect mania for economy and retrenchment. You must have observed it? It makes me quite wretched.'

'You do not care about economy?' observed Cyprian, quickly.

Miss Crookenden smiled very prettily.—'No, I don't care much about it, I'm afraid. I believe I am a terrible spendthrift.'

'My dear, pray do not call yourself by such distressing names,' pleaded Miss Harriet, gently.

'Oh I don't call myself a spendthrift. I call myself generous, indifferent to base considerations of pounds, shillings, and pence; superior to the love of money which is the root of all evil, anything and everything the reverse of that most objectionable thing named stingy,' the girl answerd, brightly. 'It is dear Sara Jacobini who calls me a spendthrift.'

'And your uncle,' suggested Aldham.

'No, there you do him an injustice,' she answered, gravely. 'Uncle Kent is only—well—near, where he himself is concerned. He assures me he never realized how interesting life could be till he beame a miser. A miser!—it make me miserable, but, really, absurd as it seems, that is the only word. I believe soon he will deny himself the actual necessaries of life.'

Several passages in the above conversation had proved anything but reassuring to Mr. Aldham. He spoke now with his habitual courtesy of demeanour but with a slight lapse in his habitual taste and tact.

'I do not think you need be seriously anxious on that point, Miss Crookenden. I had the pleasure of dining with your uncle about a fortnight ago, and I did not observe any tendency to asceticism which could be described as dangerous. There were no signs of positive want.'

Mary opened her beautiful eyes rather wide, and fixed them on the speaker. She appeared surprised.

'Please, understand,' she said, 'that if you have the most delightful aunt in the world, I, in my opinion, am the happy owner of quite the most delightful uncle.'—Turning to the old lady, she added, softly:

—'He spoils me, Miss Harriet. Ever since I can remember he has petted, and indulged, and spoilt me. And, dear me, it is very, very nice to be spoilt.'

'It would not be very easy to spoil you, my dear, I think,' Miss Aldham put in, perhaps rather inconsequently. She was anxious that these young people should part on the best terms possible, and she was vaguely sensible that the conversation had turned a trifle sour, somehow.

'Wouldn't it? I wish I thought that,' Mary said, her tone changing. 'But I really must go. Think of poor Lance, all this time, waiting on the outskirts of a crowd of footmen! Think of the annihilating composure with which Aunt Caroline will receive me, and proceed to point out that, as usual, I am dreadfully late. *Au revoir,* dear Miss Harriet. You help in the spoiling. I shall come back again in a day or two for another dose.'

And with that, Mary Crookenden, in her vaporous blue and white flounces and ribbons, swept away downstairs and into the guardianship of the watchful and devoted Mrs. Chloe, followed by Cyprian Aldham as far as the front door.

The pretty old lady, meanwhile, sat down on one of the pale chintz-covered sofas upstairs, and smoothed down the lap of her grey satin dress with a quick movement of the hands as of some sweet, quakerish, little bird preening its feathers.

'Dearest Cyprian,' she said, 'he loves her, and no wonder. She is a lovely creature. And she will love him too. How can she help it? I wish he would speak? Perhaps he thinks he is not well enough off

to propose to her—dear child, calling herself a spendthrift! But I think I can rectify that; I must tell him—though it makes me a little nervous—he can have all he wants.'

She smoothed down her grey satin lap again. 'Ah! please God,' she went on, 'I may live to see it! Precious boy.—Then I could indeed say my Nunc Dimittis cheerfully.'

Does desire ever fail? I think not; whatever, according to the revisers of the Old Testament, may happen to its alternative, the caperberry.

Chapter IV.

The famous conductor raises his *baton*—two beats—and then from the red and yellow band-stand, on the left, the first notes of the polished, courtly introduction to Weber's '*Invitation a la valse*' sweep out on the evening air.

'Ah, what a relief! After the drench of Wagnerian discords I endured during three mortal hours last night to please you, Mary, this comes like a return of the golden age.'

The speaker, a lady of middle-age, leaned her shoulder against one of the iron pillars of the wide open gallery running along the front of the great conservatories, and beat out the time of the air on the top of the balustrade with thin nervous fingers on which sparkled a rather superfluous number of rings. She was frankly ugly. Her brown skin was parchment-like and wrinkled. Her forehead was crossed

by many hard lines. There were hard lines, too, about her large mouth. Her grey hair, frizzed thickly in front, looked harsh against her dark face. Her eyes were brown, and at this moment extremely bright, as she moved her head to and fro in sympathy with the music, and stared, with the assurance of a person who is accustomed to publicity and perfectly secure of herself, at the slowly circulating crowd and the rows of people sitting on the terrace below. I have described this lady as frankly ugly, yet those who saw her for the first time generally received an impression of a far from plain woman. For there was an extraordinary mobility in her expression, her face was so vivacious and clever, her self-assurance imposed so upon the observer's imagination, that I have often—even after an acquaintance of long standing—found myself watching Madame Jacobini with as much interest as though she had been a well-accredited beauty.

The year of which we are speaking was among the first of those in which the British public, distinguishing itself by the discovery that it is more agreeable to be out of doors than indoors on a hot midsummer evening, proceeded, under the plea of improving its mind by studies, inventive, hygienic, piscatorial or imperial, to spend some hours nightly in the gardens that occupied the space between the back of the Exhibition buildings and the conservatories of the Royal Horticultural Society. No doubt they do these things better in France. The English nature, even in moments of legitimate frivolity, commits itself with a certain reserve to its amusements. Yet, although the

press of human figures occupying the large stage were, as Madame Jacobini allowed, somewhat lacking in superficial gaiety and animation, the general effect was a brilliant one.

The gardens appeared vast and fantastic as some scene from the Arabian Nights under the lines of softly tinted lanterns festooned from tree to tree. Each grass plat was edged by tiny globes of jewelled light. The shrubs broke into strange blossoming of rosy lamps which were doubled by reflections in the gleaming surface of water. The air was thick with the sound of music; the monotonous hum of hundreds of quiet English voices; the stir of hundreds of well-set English footsteps pacing the central terrace and all the diverging alleys and wide stone stairways; with the splash and tinkle of fountains falling in broken rainbows of amber, ruby, or lambent green; and with the hoarse roar, like the ceaseless urgent beat of some tideless sea, of all London stretching away for miles outside, north, south, and east and west. While high in mid-air, in singular contrast to the fairy-like space of rich conflicting colour, of strangely tinted foliage, and shifting human figures below, the cold merciless stare of the electric light—harsh and untempered as the spirit of modern science to which it owes its birth—showed dazzling against the sombre curtain of the sky, and called into hard relief the roofs and parapets of the neighbouring buildings.

'How any one in their senses,' continued Madame Jacobini, 'can find relaxation or inspiration in listening to music that is a cross between an acrostic, a

sermon, and a problem in the higher mathematics, with spectacular incidents tacked on to it worthy only of a second-rate pantomime, I own I do not understand. Of course I know it may be said Weber paved the way. He was an innovator, and had the abominably bad taste to be born a German too. But nothing will persuade me he would not have held his ears and cried "Enough" before the end of the first act of any one of Wagner's operas. Tee-tee, tum-tee, tee-tee, tum-tee—ah! ah!—delicious, ravishing,' she exclaimed, as the subtle melody swept on. 'Listen to that enchanting lift and then the drop! It gathers up all the happy and all the desperate things that have ever happened in a ball-room. Dear me, the man who conceived that must have been something of a wizard!'

'Signor Jacobini was a disciple of Weber's?' inquired Mary Crookenden.

The girl sat well back in the chair, which she had dragged out of the rank, and turned round facing the front of the open gallery. There was a repose, a pretty indolence in her attitude, which formed a marked contrast to the vivacity of her companion.

'Jacobini, poor dear creature, was unfortunately obstinately and exclusively his own disciple,' returned the latter. 'Otherwise I should now, I suppose, be drawing a comfortable income from the royalties on his sixteen operas. Dear, execrable little operas!—You never heard one of them performed, Mary?'

Miss Crookenden shook her head in smiling silence.

'No, of course you never did. They all died of

neglect or inanition with fearful rapidity. Yet there were some charming airs in them. Did I tell you I heard an air from one of them—"The Silesian Lover"—ground out on a very, very old organ in St. George's Road the other day? It met me like a ghost at the street corner, that poor little tune. In a moment of sentiment I gave the rascally Italian organ-grinder five shillings.'

'That was an error of judgment, Sara,' the young lady remarked.—Madame Jacobini, it may be stated in passing, requested that her Christian name might always be pronounced in the Italian manner and written without the final h.—'He will go in the strength of that five shillings up and down St. George's Road for many days. And, you know you hate an organ.'

Madame Jacobini huddled her velvet and fur mantle closer about her thin shoulders—she was one of those persons who are preternaturally sensitive to cold—with a little grimace and quick, half humorous, half melancholy smile, as she let her eyes linger on the long perspective of swaying lanterns.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'the poor sillly superannuated little tune made me feel young again—for three minutes, at least. So it was cheap, uncommonly cheap, my dear, at five shillings.'

'Forgive me—I was stupid,' Miss Crookenden said. 'I ought not to have said that; it was very thoughtless.'

Madame Jacobini turned to the girl, contemplated the charming, upturned face, and then answered, laughing quietly:—'You will readily be forgiven

greater sins than this, Mary, I fancy, if you only beg pardon for them looking as you look now.'

Miss Crookenden sank back in her chair. It was not easy to say how far she relished such outspoken allusions to her beauty. The aspects of her character were, as we have said, contradictory. And if she had moments of audacity, in which she indulged in rather unconventional breadth of speech and action, she had also moments of proud modesty, in which she shrank, with an instinctive movement of self-protection, from compliments which most pretty women can swallow without any winking. Outwardly this young lady was remarkably finished and mature. Inwardly, in mind and heart, she was delightfully vague and inexperienced. I say delightfully, and yet it must be admitted that the results of this inexperience often proved inconvenient both to herself and others. Miss Crookenden refused to see what was unlovely, to admit the existence of what was impure. If she needs must touch pitch, she would whitewash her pitch first, believing thereby to escape defilement. Many of the sweetest and noblest women go through life practising these pious frauds upon themselves. It is impossible not to honour them. Yet fraud, even of this high-minded description, remains fraud still and brings its inevitable punishment along with it.

Madame Jacobini's experience of life, on the other hand, had been pretty mixed. With a high standard of personal conduct she combined a large toleration for the follies and frailty of her fellow-creatures. She had known dear good people often do that which was very much the reverse of dear or good. She con-

tinued to hope all things, being a generous-natured woman. But she had learned to expect little. She was not easily surprised, easily shocked. Consequently it was alarming to her to watch Mary Crookenden—to note the girl's refusal to be enlightened regarding the seamy side of life. Madame Jacobini was often at a loss how to act for the best in this matter. She saw that her young charge had a disconcerting tendency to walk very near the edge of small social precipices without at all measuring the inconveniences of that style of promenade. Should she call out and warn her in plain English? Should she remain silent! Innocence, in pictures, is represented as guarded by strong detachments of ever-watchful angels. But Madame Jacobini's faith in the vigilance of these celestial guardians was a trifle shaky. The story of Una and the lion, though vastly pretty and encouraging, is, she had reason to fear, apocryphal. Yet to rub the bloom of guilelessness off the girl's mind was an odious and ungrateful task. The elder woman shrank from it in honest disgust; and ended by contenting herself with throwing out pretty broad hints, which she trusted her young friend might profit by. Hints that, as a rule I fear, rather offended the taste than illumined the social understanding of that wilfully, and in a sense, beautifully blind maiden.

It was probably in furtherance of this project—a mild casting out of devils by Beelzebub—that after a while Madame Jacobini spoke again. She had been gazing about her in her usual frank, unapologetic manner, considering the crowd, which grew denser

upon the terrace below, and the passers—by in the gallery. She was naturally gregarious. The unreal theatrical aspect of the scene appealed to her strongly. Her sense of drama was keen—keen to the point of sometimes perceiving drama where it can hardly be said to have existed.

'There is your Russian again, Mary,' she remarked. 'He has just posted himself by the conservatory entrance. This is not so good a place for staring as the opera; and owing to your position he can only behold your hat. But he commands a fine uninterrupted view of me. *Je ne suis pas la rose, mais j'ai vécu près d'elle,* so let us hope he derives a measure of satisfaction from looking at me.'

'He is not a Russian,' Miss Crookenden said. 'I was sure of that last night. He is as English as we are ourselves.'

'Oh! well that is not saying very much. You, my dear, are half American. And I—, well, by marriage, and adoption, and tastes, and so on, I belong to half the nations of Europe.'

'A mongrel, in fact,' observed Mary, very gently.

'Precisely, and that is why your dear aunt, Mrs. Crookenden, detests me so cordially.'—Madame Jacobini made a distinctly wicked grimace this time.

'That reminds me,' Mary said, being rather anxious to change the conversation, 'I found out about Aunt Caroline's movements. She leads forth the Chosen People——'

'Don't be profane,' put in Madame Jacobini.

'But they are chosen, most carefully chosen.—The two girls, of course; Lady Dorothy; Lance, if he can

be caught; Lady Alicia and Mr. Winterbotham and Violet,—they can be caught without any difficulty at all,—and she leads them forth, as I was going to tell you, on Thursday, *via* Paris, Pontarlier, and Lausanne.'

'Then we—' began Madame Jacobini.

'Representing the mixed multitude that followed them out of Egypt, Sara?'

'We will go on Friday—'

'Friday is a very unlucky day for a journey,' remarked Miss Crookenden.

'Not so unlucky as a Thursday, when it would necessitate travelling with your aunt. We will go on Friday, by Calais, Laon, and Berne. Which way and when does Mr. Aldham go?'

'I don't know.'—There was a silence.

'Dear me, I wish something would happen,' Mary remarked presently. 'I wonder why they don't come—Adolphus Carr and Mr. Aldham, I mean. They ought to be here by this time. Can't you see them, Sara? Lance is generally pretty obvious.'

'I see no one but the Russian,' replied Madame Jacobini, returning rather maliciously to the charge. 'His eyes are oblique, and his moustache grows up away from his lip—you know how I mean, and he has the figure of a bear. He is a Russian from the south-eastern provinces, with a strong dash of Tartar blood. I am never mistaken in a nationality.'

'His clothes are English. At least they were last night.'

'Clothes!' cried Madame Jacobini, contemptuously. 'They prove nothing. In these days we are the tailors

of the universe. He is a Russian, I tell you, a Socialist, a Nihilist, something tremendous, and'—she paused a moment,—'he is distractedly anxious to have another look at you.'

'I wish they would come,' Miss Crookenden repeated. She got up from her chair with much indolent grace, and rested her hands on the iron balustrade. 'I wonder I don't see Lancelot. I told him where to meet us.'

She stood for a minute or two scanning the gardens below, and then turning round, glanced slowly up and down the gallery. She sat down suddenly again, her charming face wearing an expression of active annoyance.—'How extremely unpleasant!' she exclaimed. 'Your Russian was staring this way.'

'He usually is staring this way, put in the other lady, parenthetically.

'But I had no notion he was so near. I found myself looking him full in the face.'

'Dear, dear, what a cruel misfortune—specially for him, poor man,' cried Madame Jacobini, putting up both hands and eyebrows.

'As I told you, he is an Englishman,' the girl continued, rather loftily ignoring the interruption. 'And now I remembered him perfectly. I thought I recognized him last night. I saw him at that big party of the Ostler Westcott's I went to with Mrs. Frank Lorimer, when you had a headache, and couldn't go—you remember? He stood in a corner and shoals of people were taken and introduced to him, and he glared at them like a wild beast in a cage.'

'Dear me, how very disagreeable,' remarked Madame Jacobini. 'In any case he has departed now. There he goes down the steps.'

'I meant to have asked who he was, and then we went, or I forgot, or something—'

'Oh! here you are, Polly. That's all right. I've been hunting all over the place for you. It was the merest chance I found you. Why have you turned your chair round the wrong way?'

Madame Jacobini received the speaker, Lancelot, with one of her wide genial smiles. She had a great kindness for this good-looking, simple-minded, far-away cousin.—'Mary and I always turn our chairs the wrong way on principle. It is an assertion of personal liberty, a private declaration of independence.'

'I can't sit in a row,' said Miss Crookenden. 'It is so terribly inartistic to sit in a row. That is a refinement of feeling you don't appreciate, Lance. You would always be willing to sit in a row.'

The young man smiled down at her with a very pretty mixture of adoration, protection, and endearment.—'Oh! I don't know, Polly,' he said, good-humouredly. 'I never thought about it. I suppose I generally do what everybody else does. It doesn't seem to be worth while to be peculiar, you know, unless there's a good deal to be gained by it.'

Nevertheless he turned a chair round, and placed it in close proximity to his cousin's.

'Aldham and Carr will be here directly,' he added, as he did so. 'They stopped to speak to some man on the steps.—I say, Madame Jacobini, what's the matter? Why are you laughing?'

'I only wondered whether you gained a good deal on the present occasion by being peculiar.'

Lancelot waited before replying. Perhaps he did not catch her meaning at first.—'Yes, I believe I do, Madame Jacobini,' he said presently, very quietly. 'And I mean to make the most of it. I am afraid it mayn't last.'

Mary turned her charming head away.

'Ah! here they come!' she said. 'My dear Lance, what has happened to you? You become oracular.' —Then, without waiting for an answer, she rose and went a step or two forward to meet the two gentlemen as they advanced slowly towards her.

Madame Jacobini, hitching up her mantle about her shoulders, moved forward also. As we have said, this good woman had a remarkable gift for the perception of drama. It led her not infrequently to commit indiscretions. Now, as Lancelot got up and stood aside to let her pass, she read, or fancied she read a silent appeal in his expression. She was soft-hearted and it moved her.—'It will last,' she said, impulsively. 'Don't be afraid. It ought to last. It must last—that is if you really want it to.'

'Want it to?—Why,' the lad broke out, 'why I've never wanted anything else as long as I can remember.'

Madame Jacobini opened her mouth and brought her teeth together with a little snap.

'Eh! eh! my dear young man!' she said softly. The drama was of a profounder character than she had anticipated. Where there is smoke there is always fire, says the proverb. But in this case she had

been quite unprepared to see the flame blaze up so brightly.

Chapter V.

At this point I must request the reader to picture to himself Cupid as a bachelor of fifty, well-preserved, faultlessly arrayed in accordance with the existing fashion; his wanton humours reduced to a dainty discretion; his freakishness sobered by a large acquaintance with the world. Cupid, in short, as an accomplished gentleman of to-day. A person of means, of leisure, and elegant tastes; a successful amateur of the fine arts, with a pretty little talent for music, painting, and the writing of fiction and a considerable influence in that section of society where art and letters join hands with the smart world. Picture this, I say, and you have a very fair portrait of Mr. Adolphus Carr.

During some months in the year it was Mr. Carr's habit to keep open house at his charming place in Sussex. But, notwithstanding his graceful gift of landscape painting, the pavement was more congenial to him than the long upward roll of the Sussex downs, the hanging woods and rich hop-gardens of that delectable county. I may add, perhaps, that the opera was more congenial to him than the singing of birds; and the elaborate posturings of some fair figurante than the gambols of those rather overrated quadrupeds, the young lambs, whether bounding—as in the pages of the poets—to the sound of the tabor, or in alarmed response to the barking of the sheep-dog,

as in ordinary life. Simple tastes are, after all, among the most difficult things in the world to cultivate. Mr. Carr extolled the country but he loved the town. Discretion was his forte. Even in the privacy of his own mind he practised a certain ingenious indirectness. Otherwise he would probably have asserted that there is a distressing element of nakedness, so to speak, in the country. It is all so terribly definite. Its few inhabitants, and the manners and customs of them, are so clearly recognizable, as almost indecently distinct.

This being the attitude of Mr. Carr's mind it will readily be understood that, upon the evening in question, as he advanced down the gallery, through the spaces of tinted shadow and tempered brightness, surrounded by the close-packed, well-dressed, slow-moving crowd; and bowed, finally, with discreetly affectionate civility over the hand of our highly-finished young lady, Miss Crookenden, his soul was satisfied, he was comfortable in spirit, he was entirely at his ease. There was no distressing element of nakedness here. Civilisation had gone far towards doing her perfect work. Nature, whether human or otherwise, was agreeably removed from its primitive, rudimentary conditions. There was no shocking directness about it. It was all modesty veiled—in a sense at least.

But Mr. Carr was nothing if not polite. He immediately began to account for himself with an air of admirably serious mildness.

'We should have presented ourselves sooner, Miss Crookenden—how d'ye do, Madame Jacobini? A de-

lightful evening, isn't it? Even our English climate has its happy moments. Yes, as I was saying, we should have been here before—ah! there is Crookenden! He ran away from us—but I happened to see James Colthurst—you know his pictures? Yes, of course.—And Aldham was anxious to be introduced to him.'

Mr. Carr arranged himself neatly in a chair between the two ladies. In talking he always had the effect of communicating a secret of grave importance to his auditors, which must on no account be allowed to go any further, as the phrase is. This is a most useful style of manner. It is obviously complimentary to the hearer, while it practically leaves the speaker in full possession of the conversation. For who would be so indelicate as to interrupt the teller of a secret?

'Colthurst is a singular person. There is an immense amount of force in him—something cosmic, really cosmic. You know him by sight, Miss Crookenden, of course?'

The young lady made a sign of dissent.

Lancelot shifted his position, causing the legs of his chair to scroop on the asphalt.—'Have you had any very jolly music to-night, Madame Jacobini?' he asked, suddenly.

But Mr. Carr went forward serenely with his narration.

'No, really, Miss Crookenden? I should have thought you must have seen him. He is peculiar looking, and he has been about a good deal this season. I have been interested in him for some time, I

confess. The prejudice against his work has been very strong; even now it yields unwillingly. He belongs to the school of Bastien-Lepage, and in a degree to that of Jean François Millet.'

'More to that of Bastien-Lepage than of Millet, I should say,' put in Aldham, smiling.

'Yes, perhaps. The religious element certainly is not conspicuous. There was a picture of his some years ago in the Grosvenor—you would hardly remember it, Miss Crookenden—which brought a storm of abuse down upon him. It was not pleasant, I own. Still, I thought at the time, and I still think, the expression of feeling it called out was exaggerated. He is a realist, of course, and of a very pronounced type. But his realism is not devoid of poetry. There is nothing really objectionable in it—nothing gross.'

Lancelot who, since his unsuccessful sally, had been leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of his chair, and apparently making a critical examination of the pavement between his feet, here glanced up at Cyprian Aldham.

'That depends upon what you mean by gross,' he murmured.

'His pictures are detestably melancholy, in any case,' broke in Madame Jacobini. 'My dear Mr. Carr, you cannot deny it. They are *assomant*. But there! so is all the art of the present day. *Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse*—that is what it is for ever telling you. Preach, preach, preach!—I am not abusing sermons, Mr. Aldham. They are most edifying things in their proper place, and no one enjoys listening to a good one more than I do. But sermons in action,

and when you want to cheer and comfort your eyes with the sight of something pretty too,—it is prodigiously trying. I don't need to go to a picture gallery to learn that there are miserable, paralytic, pitiable objects in the world, like that wretched old drover in "The Evening of Labour." Or that there are foolish young men and women either, with whom repentance will probably come too late. "The Road to Ruin," now, what—'

At this juncture Mary Crookenden's large white feather fan slipped, with a little crash, on to the ground.

'Ah, how stupid of me. Thanks; no, it is not broken. This is not its first tumble, poor thing. I am always forgetting it. I must have a ribbon put on to it,' she said, in her low, sweet voice, as Aldham picked it up and presented it to her.

'Oh! yes, I sympathize to a very great extent.'—Mr. Carr addressed himself to Madame Jacobini.—'Colthurst's work does strain too much, I admit. It is restlessly full of intention. Yet it is impossible not to respect him. He has shown such dogged persistence in the face of adverse criticism. He has submitted to poverty, real pressing poverty for years—that I know on the best authority—rather than paint for mere popularity. And with his great technical skill, he might easily have been popular had he pleased. He deserves his success in that way, at all events. He has paid a severe price for it. False or true he has suffered for his faith.'

'That is fine,' Mary Crookenden said, slowly. 'I don't think we have any of us done that quite, have

we?' she went on, diligently smoothing and arranging the feathers composing her fan, crumpled by their fall.—'Sara, I know you would give your head for the triumph of Italian over German opera. And Mr. Aldham, I am sure, would suffer directly if necessary—die joyfully for a dogma. And Lance would be shot at the shortest possible notice for—oh! for a whole lot of things—even if he did not quite understand what they were—if I begged him very nicely to be shot. And I—no doubt there are founts of heroism in me also.'

The young girl clasped her hands and surveyed her companions with a strange little laugh. Two of the said companions, at least, though startled by her words, found her most bewilderingly lovely just then.

'But nobody wants us to suffer. Nobody wants to martyr us. Nobody will take the trouble to give us a chance of showing off our fine qualities.'—She bent forward, smiling.—'Mr. Carr, will you do me a great kindness?'

'With the sincerest pleasure—any in the world, short of supplying you with an opportunity for martyrdom, my dear Miss Crookenden,' he answered, suavely.

'Go and find Mr. Colthurst then, and bring him here, and introduce me to him. I want to know somebody who has'—Mary stopped suddenly, and laughed again. 'Is it not rather absurd though?' she said. 'Am I not making a mountain out of a mole-hill? Look at all this, at the lights, the fountains—listen to that valse tune. Is there any such grisly thing as suf-

fering after all? Any such thing as poverty? Or as convictions? Surely they are all delusions. Well then, if they are, it will be all the more entertaining to make Mr. Colthurst's acquaintance. It will be all the more diverting to see a realist—when one knows there is nothing really real—a realist who has gone the length of actually suffering, suffering that most odious of all things too, poverty, for the sake of his—yes, they must be so—his delusions!'

For once Mr. Carr's tact deserted him. Miss Crookenden's address had taken all her hearers by surprise. Aldham was not only surprised but annoyed. His idol was presenting herself in a new aspect. Aldham was by no means weak, though he was in love. There were points, he began to think, in which his idol would bear slight reconstruction. He felt entirely equal to carrying out such reconstruction when the time should arrive. His expression grew severe, for he objected to being surprised—specially by a woman.

Mr. Carr, on his part, was not only surprised, but embarrassed. He had interested himself warmly in Colthurst's fortunes. Had interested critics in him too; had spoken a good word for him to newspaper editors; had presented him to capitalists with a hankering after modern pictures; had, in short—for notwithstanding his artificiality and general slightness of make this elderly Cupid was extremely kind-hearted—had, I say, done a large amount of wire-pulling and discreet puffing. But it is quite one thing to help forward a struggling artist yourself, and quite another to present him to a very exquisite young lady,

possessed of two thousand a year and an enthusiasm for the fine arts—a young lady of whose charms you have so high an appreciation, that possibilities of the tenderest description have presented themselves more than once to your imagination.

Moreover there were queer rumours about James Colthurst. Mr. Carr was not one of those who give proof of their own immaculate cleanliness by much curious inspection of their neighbour's dust-bins. He let the rumours rest. He neither inquired into them, nor repeated them. That the painter had lived pretty hard, he thought more than possible. But it was really no business of his. Social life was in his opinion a nicely constructed show, wherein a good deal necessarily went on behind the scenes, which was not intended for the eyes of the public seated in the boxes, stalls, or pit. The actors were at their best upon the stage. Common courtesy demands that it is by the figure they cut there you should judge them. To pursue them into the dressing-rooms, and examine them wigless and unpainted; to note the peculiarities of the poor, knock-kneed, would-be king, queen, or courtier, deprived of all bravery of buckrum and tinsel, is a stupidity and outrage. Yet liberal-minded as he was—liberal minded many good persons will doubtless remark to the verge of laxity—Adolphus Carr permitted himself a measure of discrimination. He would not cast a stone—heaven forbid!—at any one. But he held that men are divisible into several orders. And that one of these is composed of individuals, who, though most agreeable companions to members of their own sex, are not equally eligible ac-

quaintances for young, unmarried ladies whom you hold in the most respectful esteem.

'I shall be delighted,' he said, after a perceptible interval of hesitation.

Lancelot had risen uneasily from his seat. He stood resting one hand on the back of his sousin's chair. The young man was acutely uncomfortable. He wanted to put a stop to the whole matter. But words did not come readily to him. He did not see how to say anything without saying too much.

'Delighted of course'—Carr went on, passing one lady-like hand over his cheek, and toying a little with his eye-glass—'if I can find Mr. Colthurst. But I fancy he was leaving when we met him. And there is this further little difficulty. He is, as I remarked just now, a peculiar person, Miss Crookenden. He is rather shy, rather *gauche,* I must own. And he has an honest horror of being lionized. Perhaps he may not appreciate his good fortune. It is even conceivable that he may refuse to obey your summons.'

To make this rejoinder went sorely against the grain with Adolphus Carr. It was, he felt, anything but a graceful speech to address to a lady. But he trusted it might give his fair neighbour a hint which would make her abstain from insisting on her request. As he finished speaking he cast a discreetly meaning glance upon Madame Jacobini enlisting her support and intervention.—Her response was prompt.

'Ah! look, Mary!' she cried, with much animation, 'there is our bone of contention again. Mr. Carr shall decide. Miss Crookenden and I have had a warm discussion as to the nationality of that par-

ticularly plain person. I say he is a Russian; but Miss Crookenden declares——'

'I declare nothing. I am very much bored by our bone of contention,' the girl remarked, coolly.

'No, no,' the elder lady insisted. 'It is a point of honour with me to be right in my nationalities. We will have Mr. Carr's opinion. You see the man, there? He is unmistakable. He has the figure of a bear, and he walks like a cat.'

'Great Scott!' murmured Lancelot Crookenden.

The young man had been quick for once. A good deal quicker than Adolphus Carr, indeed. The latter put up his eye-glass daintily, and gazed in the direction indicated. Presently he dropped it again, and dangled it by its single, fine, gold cord with a certain deliberation. He did not echo Lancelot's crude little expression of feeling; but he, too, feared that Madame Jacobini had very neatly and completely performed the feat commonly known as jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire.

'Well?' demanded that lady. 'Well?'

'You are mistaken in your nationality on the present occasion,' Carr answered. 'That is the person we have been speaking of—Mr. James Colthurst, the painter.'

'Eh! eh!'—and Madame Jacobini's little grimace was expressive of considerable relief. She was disposed to applaud the guardian angels, and congratulate them on behaving with most praiseworthy tact for once. She looked across maliciously at Mary Crookenden.

It happened that Mr. Aldham was observing Miss

Crookenden also. His lips were compressed and his expression somewhat hard. He was not at all pleased. But displeasure did not make Aldham turn away. He did not spare himself. He looked closely, as a rule, at that which displeased him. Is it conceivable that he derived a subtle satisfaction from his own displeasure, that it ministered to his sense of his own superiority? Adolphus Carr's announcement had evidently taken Miss Crookenden altogether by surprise. Aldham saw her start. She rarely blushed, and she did not do so on this occasion. But her eyes dilated curiously. They appeared actually to grow with intensity of colour. Aldham noted a pause of indecision. Then she rose with a charming, indolent dignity, and addressed Mr. Carr.—'Ah!' she said, 'if that is Mr. Colthurst, I don't think he will refuse, if you will kindly ask him to come and speak to us.'

'But, my dear Mary, just consider—surely—' broke in Madame Jacobini, aghast, mindful of precipices, and very distrustful of guardian angels again.

Pride had made Miss Crookenden perverse. She had inadvertently got into a difficult position. She would have been glad to escape from it. But she had, so she thought, committed herself too far. And in her desire to appear quite mistress of herself, she over-acted her part.

'Surely what, Sara?' she inquired, innocently. 'What is the matter? Can't you recover having made a mistake in your nationalities? What a pity it is we hadn't a small bet about the matter. I might have won a pair of gloves.'

Miss Crookenden held out her fan with a pretty

air of command. Her eyes dilated again. Still her manner was faultlessly quiet, the tones of her voice gravely sweet.

'Dear Mr. Carr, if you value my friendship, go and catch Mr. Colthurst and bring him here. Madame Jacobini has called him a bear; well, then, let him be made to dance for us. It would be something new. I have been longing for something to happen, and this would suit me so nicely, for I have not seen a dancing bear for an age, and I dote on them. The last one I saw was at Brattleworthy. You must remember it, Lancelot. It came with two Frenchmen in blue blouses. It had on a big muzzle, poor dear beast, which looked horribly uncomfortable. And we fed it with cake on the lawn in front of the dining-room window.'

'This bear's another question,' Lancelot answered. 'I wouldn't try giving it cake.'

'Go, Mr. Carr, please,' Mary repeated, with gentle insistence.

Here Madame Jacobini emitted a sound expressive of lively irritation. It may be rendered by the following alphabetical combination—'Tschah!' Then she turned upon Cyprian Aldham and inquired very briskly when and by what route he proposed travelling out to Switzerland.

'It—I—well, you know, Polly, I wish awfully you'd let it be,' blundered out poor Lancelot. 'We are very well as we are. He'll only be in the way. And between ourselves, I don't fancy that fellow Colthurst's looks a bit better than I do his pictures. I don't believe he's the sort of man for you to know.

I'd very much rather you had nothing to do with him.'

But the remonstrance came too late. Mr. Carr, to whom anything in the form of even a verbal struggle was highly distasteful, had started on his little mission. The fact, meanwhile, that she knew herself to be in an equivocal position disposed Miss Crookenden to be resentful. When a woman has perpetrated a folly she usually revenges herself first upon the friend who has done his best to save her from perpetrating it. Mary, therefore, turned upon the devoted youth and incontinently smote him hip and thigh, veiling her blows under the most delightful smiles.

'Dear old boy, she said, 'do you know you really are a wee bit stupid and tiresome? I am afraid our tastes differ fundamentally. You are happiest with frumps. I am happiest with clever people. I like them. I like people who make a fight and get on, and distinguish themselves. I will even go a little out of my way to know them. Don't try to interfere, Lance. Understand, once and for all, it is no use interfering.'

Lancelot answered bravely enough. He looked her straight in the eyes. But his smooth, sunburnt face grew rather pale, and his lips trembled.

'All right, Polly. There are some things I understand fast enough, though I am stupid and tiresome. I suppose I've been a fool. But I promise you I shan't interfere again. I'll remember.

Then he turned his back. He took a long, steady breath, filling his fine chest, and holding himself very

upright—a young Hercules, though in regulation black coat and high collar—while he gazed down in a sort of amazement at the gay scene spread out before him. To his sight it had changed strangely in the last few moments; had become mocking, heartless, bewildering. He felt oddly alone, oddly aware of himself—cut off from his companions. Lancelot was a very simple fellow. He accepted his cousin's cruel little speech without criticism, without resentment. He was nothing to her. He was too dull, too commonplace. Of course Polly had a perfect right to send him about his business if she felt like that. He did not blame her. Perhaps it was really the kindest thing she could do under the circumstances. But it made him sad, very sad. And that sensation was a new one. In all his easy, pleasant, sweet-tempered life he had never been very sad before—at least, not in this same intimate, personal, penetrating way. It altered the relative value of everything. The landmarks were all changing; and great shadows, such as he had never seen till now, seemed to blot and chill his mental landscape. His frank, innocent, wholesome world had a sudden blight cast on it. If the sun rose to-morrow morning, it would be a different sun with less light and heat than of old.

And then, as he stared at the hundreds of men and women about him, he began to wonder if any of them felt, or ever had felt, just as he did now? It was surely a very gracious token of the lad's nature, that almost the first effect of his realisation of personal suffering was this out-going sympathy towards possible companions in misfortune.

Chapter VI.

Every one remembers the story of the fisherman, on the far Eastern sea-shore, investigating the contents of the bottle lying among the wrack in the sand—remembers the out-rush of the geni, enormous, vaguely menacing. Even Oriental impassivity and politeness failed, under consequent sensations, neatly, gracefully, composedly, to embark in ordinary conversation. The fisherman was horribly frightened—for a time, anyhow.

And it is hardly too much to assert that, at this particular juncture, Miss Crookenden came very near realizing the embarrassing sensations experienced by the said fisherman. In light-hearted, wilful curiosity she had uncorked a bottle, thrown up by the restless tide of social life at her feet. And certainly it appeared to her, when Colthurst, after a brief colloquy with Adolphus Carr, came forward in obedience to her summons and bowed, hat in hand, before her, that from out of it she had let loose an odd and even alarming sort of being. If she had been a little doubtful of the wisdom of her escapade before, she was doubly doubtful of it now. For once in her life she felt at a disadvantage. She turned shy and nervous. Something in Colthurst's presence, in his restless, comprehensive glances, disconcerted her. She feared she had adopted a *role* she was unequal to playing. Like the fisherman, polite conversation failed her. Like him, she was frightened.

For the effect of some persons is immediate and undeniable. You cannot help being aware of them,

They have an extraordinary power of charging the surrounding atmosphere with the magnetism of their own personality. It is of this queer power, I suppose, that Goethe wrote under the title of 'the dæmonic influence'; and of which he says that, though not necessarily malign, it is, at first, almost invariably repulsive. And no wonder; for it puts out strong hands, and grasps at just those secret places of the soul which ordinary human intercourse, ordinary human affections, leave wholly undisturbed, reposing in comfortably unintelligent silence and obscurity.

The last bars of Strauss' brilliant valse,—rapid and still more rapid, riotous almost, as it neared its conclusion,—were being rattled out by the band. Possibly the stern roll of the kettledrums and fierce clang of the cymbals, the breathless rush of hurrying notes ringing in her ears, helped to trouble Miss Crookenden. A final crash. Then an interval of comparative silence, through which James Colthurst's whispering, stammering accents rose into singular distinctness and importance.

'I am very much honoured by your permitting Mr. Carr to p-present me to you,' he said. 'I believe we have a common ground of interest, Miss Crookenden. I understand that you draw and paint well.

The speech was abrupt in its directness. The speaker was abrupt, too, dominating, engrossing, possessive.—Just them a dropping fire of applause, tribute to the excellence of the musical performance lately concluded, broke from the crowded audience upon the terrace and gallery. To Mary Crookenden,

coming at that particular moment, this had a startling effect. It heightened her sense of embarrassment. For it seemed as though she and the man standing before her formed the centre of attention; as though this great concourse of human beings had come together to witness their first meeting. A fateful element seemed suddenly to have intruded itself amid the frivolous common-places of the evening. Mary had a fantastic feeling that a magic circle was being drawn around her, isolating her mysteriously with this stranger. Instead of answering him, she turned half away, in sudden absurd shrinking from this imaginary publicity, in unreasoning desire for protection and escape. But none of her company of friends appeared disposed to come to her rescue. Lancelot's back was still towards her as he stared sadly out over the illuminated gardens. Aldham was nearer. He was watching her. But there was no softening of helpfulness, rather a reserve and doubtfully complimentary criticism, in his expression. Miss Crookenden divined that he, too, disapproved of her action. Adolphus Carr's ladylike countenance presented a civil blank. If the present situation in any way approximated to a 'free fight,' Mr. Carr evidently wished devoutly to be counted not 'in,' but 'out.' Madame Jacobini, moreover, showed an unsympathetic front. She was adjusting her mantle impatiently about her angular shoulders, talking loudly to everybody and nobody at the same time, with a rather ostentatious show of indifference.

'Do pray let us walk about,' she said. 'It is growing shockingly chilly.—The music is over, I suppose.

They do play superbly; but I shall be quite content to hear God save the Queen, at a distance, all the same. The throne will be none the firmer for my standing still here and catching a violent cold in my head listening to the National Anthem.—Yes, you're perfectly right, Mr. Carr; brass is the only thing that tells out of doors. Strings are nowhere. They are far too delicate for the open air.'—Madame Jacobini turned to the young girl.—'Are you coming, Mary? We are going to see the illumination of the big fountains, and then I am going home.'

As she spoke the lady treated Colthurst to the minutest fraction of a bow, subjecting him at the same time to a pretty searching scrutiny. She looked him well up and down, as the phrase is, and during that process the expression was far from conciliatory.

Miss Crookenden had asked bread of her friends, and it seemed to her that one and all of them presented her with the first stone that came handy. Lancelot's back, Cyprian's face, Mr. Carr's rather pusillanimous attitude, the tones of Madame Jacobini's voice, were alike discouraging. Everybody was unkind—so it seemed to the girl. Instead of helping her out of a difficulty, they combined to push her deeper into it. She rallied her pride. She determined to show them that she did not care one bit. Again she overacted her part.

'Oh! pray on no account catch cold, Sara,' she said, gravely. 'Your colds are a public calamity; they put out all one's plans. And that would be by no means amusing, just on the eve of going abroad. I am prepared not only to walk, but actually to run about, if

it would prevent your catching one. Please, Mr. Carr, don't allow her to stand still a single minute longer.'—Then she turned with a very pretty smile to Colthurst.—'Whoever told you I draw and paint well was more kind than truthful,' she said. 'But one does not quarrel very much with one's friends' untruthfulness if it helps to procure one an introduction to some one whom one is happy to know.—Would you mind taking this for me? I cannot agree with Madame Jacobini that it's chilly to-night, and so I should be glad to spare myself the weight of this thick cloak.—Thanks so much—oh yes, that sketch book! If you will kindly poke it well down into the pocket, it will be quite safe.'

Colthurst was not much used to acting as a squire of dames. He gathered up the pale green *câche misère* hanging over the back of Miss Crookenden's chair, and pushed the sketch-book back into the pocket of it, under an odd sense of excitement. The straight, proud glance of the young girl's eyes, her grave voice, her languid manner, stirred his blood. The two natures in Colthurst played their game of skill now, as persistently, and, for his own peace of mind, as dangerously, as they had played it ten years ago. And as the soft, rich folds of Mary Crookenden's cloak fell across his arm, the emotional nature was undoubtedly in the ascendant.

Madame Jacobini, meanwhile, as she led the way along the gallery, down the steps, across the crowded terrace, and into a narrow alley on the right of the gardens,—Adolphus Carr talking, ignoring the prevailing sense of slight discomfort, with all his might,

at her side—Madame Jacobini raged inwardly. For she did not in the very least like the turn affairs had taken.

'Mary flirts most unconscionably,' she said to herself. And then directly she had said it she repented. The judgment was too harsh a one. For she knew perfectly well that Miss Crookenden probably cared no more to stimulate the admiration of this new acquaintance than she would have cared to stimulate the admiration of one of the turncocks managing the waterworks, or the electricians managing the dynamos.—'But how is he to know that, wretched man?' she continued. 'Of course, he will imagine she finds him enchanting.'

Madame Jacobini, on the contrary, did not find James Colthurst in the least enchanting, though she admitted she had been guilty of an exaggeration in describing his as an oblique-eyed Tartar. He was tall —about five feet eleven and a half, to be quite accurate; but a short neck and high, square shoulders detracted considerably from the effect of his height, and made the upper part of his person appear somewhat unwieldy. His chest was deep, and he held himself well. His arms were rather short; his hands handsome, finely modelled, full of character, broad in the palm, and very prettily set into the wrist. Colthurst knew this. He was very fond of his own hands and wrists. They afforded him considerable satisfaction, and he always wore large, open wristbands, so as to afford them free play and exhibition.

In his make, as a whole, there was a singular combination of finish and clumsiness. Madame Jacobini,

glancing at his long, neat legs and small feet, felt sure he must be an extremely good dancer. His head was large—wide when seen in profile, the distance from the nostril to the base of the skull being remarkable, yet the actual masque was rather narrow and square in shape. A deep horizontal line crossed the forehead, dividing it into two distinct portions, of which the lower one bulged noticeably over the eyebrows. Colthurst's eyes were reddish brown, opaque, and in form long and narrow, unshaded by much eyelash. They were sunk in close under the rim of the eye-socket, causing the upper lids almost to disappear when open. He had no hair on his face, save a fringed, rusty-red moustache, growing up away from the lip and leaving the mouth uncovered. His teeth were even and rather long. His skin had the dull sallow tone of a person not greatly addicted to country air and exercise.

It is needless to state that Madame Jacobini did not draw out this detailed inventory of the merits and demerits of James Colthurst's personal appearance as she treated him to a repressively curt bow on that particular July evening. She received no more than a general impression, in which bear and cat still claimed about equal shares. But subsequent events impressed his looks and bearing, his hissing, hesitating speech, his quick deft movements, the restless energy which possessed him and which he constantly strove to veil under an easy, pliant manner—subsequent events impressed all these, I say, indelibly upon her memory. There were times when she positively loathed him. There were others—for she was, as we

know, a woman of generous instincts, easily moved to compassion—when she was drawn to him by strong pity. But all that came much later. To-night she regarded him merely as a very superfluous addition to her little party, as an unexplained, unaccounted-for sort of person, and consequently as a most undesirable cavalier for Mary Crookenden—a cavalier whom that self-willed and misleading young lady must be coerced or cajoled into dropping as soon as possible.

Immediately, however, Madame Jacobini perceived that Miss Crookenden displayed not the slightest intention of dropping him. For Mary had quite recovered her self-possession. She even found her late sensation of alarm ridiculous.

This man was very much as other men are, after all —an amiable, obedient geni, quite willing to carry superfluous garments and pilot you safely through a crowd; a bear, ready enough to dance to any tune a fair damsel might please to play to him. Mary embarked in pretty speeches, which gained a value and charm she was really quite innocent of intending, from her smiling lips and the gentle gravity of her voice. She complimented Colthurst delicately, more by implication than direct assertion, upon his recently achieved renown.

'It must be a delicious sensation,' she said, 'to know that one has emerged; that one has done supremely well what so many try and fail to do.' The girl laughed a little, and her eyes had that glowing light in them. 'I can imagine nothing more inspiring, more satisfying than to have realized one's dreams, and made a great artistic success.'

They were standing on the steps leading down from the terrace. Before them the narrow alley, deserted, save for two dark figures—Madame Jacobini's and Mr. Carr's—on ahead, stretched out in long perspective. On one side of it a miniature stone-edged canal, spanned by lines of lanterns, on the other a bank of shrubbery dotted by coloured lamps. The interlacing shadows of the foliage played over the stone steps; the soft, tempered colours thrown by the lanterns stained the whiteness of Miss Crookenden's gown. The whole scene was fairy-like, unreal, provoking to the senses. Colthurst stopped, he could not resist doing so, and looked full at his companion. —'There is plenty of snow,' he thought, 'but I'm very much mistaken if there is not plenty of fire underneath the snow.'

Then he answered her rather floridly, trying to overcome his stammer by speaking in that quick, whispering way of his.

'I am afraid success, like most other fine things, looks b-best at a distance, Miss Crookenden. You are thirsty for it; you see it ahead; you press on feverishly towards the great cool levels; you stoop down to plunge your hands in it, and you scoop up nothing but dry sand. Success is a mirage, which leaves you as thirsty as it found you in the end.'

'Ah, that is sad—sad,' Mary Crookenden said—'too sad to be quite true, surely!'

'You d-don't like what's sad?'

'Who does?' she asked, smiling again.

'Yes, I know.—And yet you had better try to like it, because the truth is always sad,' Colthurst said,

quite gently. 'The great fundamental facts are not only sad, they are almost hideous. That is why nature tries to hide them under leaves and flowers, and glories of colour, and of light and shadow; and why we try to hide them under poetry and art. That is why, taking it at a lower level, we lay out gardens, make fountains play, light up lamps. In a commonplace way even these trivialities help to hide the "accepted hells beneath," the ugly bases of our life—birth, death, and—well, you have read Schopenhauer, Miss Crookenden? You remember his anatomy of what we glorify under the name of love?'

But Miss Crookenden had not read Schopenhauer. She said so promptly, and walked on down the steps; for it appeared to her this bear was beginning to dance to unexpected and rather discordant tunes.

'I can't believe that success is all mirage and dry sand,' she said.

'Oh, no! not quite all,' Colthurst answered. 'I don't care about going into society. But after having been less than nobody all your life, there is a certain pleasure in seeing your name in print, and in having countesses ask you to crushes—even if it is chiefly the pleasure of thinking your critics fools for their pains, and of refusing the fine ladies' invitations. Success obtains you these small gratifications. And then success brings money; and money is the one absolute good in life. You think it rather base to say so? That, probably, is because you have never known what it is to have to do without money, Miss Crookenden. Money sets you free—as far as freedom is p-possible. It enables you to go where you like,

see what you like, do—within certain limits—what you like. You hardly measure all money can buy, perhaps.'

Colthurst had stopped again, and again he looked full at his companion. A little breeze swayed the spanning lines of lanterns. The frail, warm colours chased each other across the girl's white muslin dress. He could hear the silk lining of her bodice give a soft, creaking rustle as she breathed. The emotional side of his nature was very much in the ascendant, just then.

'And there are innumerable things I want to b-buy,' he went on, hesitating a good deal, 'and to d-do, and places I want to see. Do you know, Miss Crookenden, what it is to have nostalgia of the whole? To get mad to see all the world and the fashion of it? To make your *salut au monde,* in short.—There is no place I don't want to see—except P-Paris.'

'And why not Paris?' Mary asked, glad to be able to say something, for she was conscious of vague but growing discomfort as she listened.

Colthurst glanced at her sharply, queerly, for a moment.

'I hate Paris,' he stammered. 'I should be extremely g-glad if fire and b-brimstone could be rained down out of heaven, or out of anywhere else for that matter, upon Paris. A little event of the sort would give me infinite satisfaction.'

A silence followed, an awkward one. Colthurst broke it rather harshly.

'However well my p-pictures may sell in the future, though, I am afraid I shall not be able to af-

ford celestial vengeance of that description,' he said. 'Heaven is impeccable, I am afraid, not to be bought. But—oh, well, short of that supreme indulgence, money may do a good deal for me. I want to go to the East. I want to see countries where men still treat each other worse than we treat our beasts. I want to see the ultimate possibilities of human degradation. I don't care about savages; they are stupid. I should like to see intelligence brought to bear on the matter; and you can only have that under the conditions of an old civilization. The inside of a Chinese prison might suit me, I think, or the slave-market at Bagdad. I want to see Ceylon, too—colossal stone Buddhas sitting cross-legged upon the sacred lotus, in the dim heart of the tropic forest, the smile of completed and absolute personality upon their lips.'

As Colthurst talked thus his stammer lessened. The whole man seemed to expand, to grow taller, darker, more absorbed and absorbing. The smile of completed impersonality was very far indeed from being present on his lips. He shifted Miss Crookenden's cloak restlessly to his other arm. He gazed at her, dominated her, even as the geni the fisherman. Again the girl grew shy before the strange being she had let loose.

'I am afraid my cloak is in your way,' she said—as she felt, rather feebly—during a pause in this astonishing Oriental excursion.

'N-no, indeed it isn't the least in my way,' Colthurst asserted.

He waited a minute, looking at the light on the

water of the canal. The ripples gave back a broken rainbow of colour upon a ground of liquid, luminous darkness. Colthurst put two fingers inside his turned-down shirt-collar, and wrenched it outward. He felt dangerously moved and excited.

'I wonder if one will ever get over this execrably bad habit of caressing the idea of an utterly improbable future, instead of limiting one's desires to the possible and the present,' he said. 'These magnificent journeys of mine, for instance, lie in an entirely improbable future. A future when the general public shall have developed a desire for innumerable "James Colthursts"—you know that hateful way of speaking of a man's pictures?—to hang on the walls of its smug, suburban dining-rooms, I must wait until Hampstead, and Highgate, and Tooting, and the wilds of Clapham Common, and kindred abodes of the British Philistine cry aloud for possession of my work before I can reasonably hope to see Cingalese Buddhas or visit slave markets at Bagdad. And the British Philistine will never cry aloud for them. So it is a future past praying for.'

Colthurst turned to the young lady. The line was cut deep across his forehead. His expression was daring and humble at once. He tried to laugh, being a little ashamed of his own excitement; but he was not good at laughter, somehow. His merriment invariably had an infusion of bitterness in it.

'Still, you are right, Miss Crookenden. Even my small success is not all dry sand. It will buy me a Cook's tourist ticket to Switzerland and Italy. That is something, after all.'—He looked at the broken

rainbow on the surface of the water again.—'For it is very good to lie among the gentians in an Alpine pasture, and see the snow-peaks braving the sunshine. Or to sit on a vineyard wall, amongst the lizards, till you are baked through to the marrow. Or to drink a bottle of sour red wine in honour of Bacchus, at a wayside *osteria,* with the traditional "bush" above the open door. Or to see a stately matron, in faded pink and lilac garments, sitting at the corner of a deep, narrow, cut-throat street, the wall behind her ripe and rich with the greasy soil of ages, frying snails. Do you know that? It is delicious. The charcoal in the brazier gives out a dry, grating crackle, and the half-naked, brown-limbed children, with the faces of cherubim just descended from heaven, crowd round, staring at the flat iron pan of bubbling, hissing, sputtering shells.'

Mary made a little movement of disgust.

'Ah! that goes a step beyond the catholicity of your artistic instinct,' Colthurst said, quickly. 'Yes, it does require a very wide range of sympathy to appreciate the æsthetic qualities of snail-frying. B-but I wonder why I say all these things to you, Miss Crookenden! They must sound very unconventional, very mad. B-but then I wonder why we happened to meet—why you happened to come here to-night at all? I should not have thought this sort of show would have been to your taste any more—well, any more than the snails.'

Mary drew herself up. She did not like the personal flavour in this last speech.

'There are a certain number of hours in the day,'

she said, coldly. 'We came here simply to get rid of a few of the superfluous ones.'

She would have walked on after firing her little shot—walked on to rejoin Madame Jacobini. That lady had seated herself on a bench at the far end of the alley. Adolphus Carr stood in front of her. She was addressing him with much energy. Madame Jacobini could not help gesticulating. She found it irresistible to suit the word to the action, and the acton to the word. Mary looked rather longingly in her direction, and took a few steps forward. But Colthurst's voice arrested her.

'Miss Crookenden,' he said, with a singular touch of authority, 'please don't play at cheap cynicism. I can't b-believe you have the smallest right to speak in that way—yet.'

The girl faced him proudly. She was wholly unaccustomed to such strictures upon the remarks she elected to make.

'Indeed,' she began. And then something in the man's face, some compelling force he seemed to exercise over her, made her check herself.—'I have no right to speak so,' she said, quite gently and gravely. 'It was an affectation. It was foolish.'

Colthurst looked down at the pale, green folds of the cloak upon his arm. His neat fingers arranged and rearranged them with quick, deft movements.

'You may retort upon me that you wonder why I came here to-night,' he said, stammering badly. 'For if you have been good enough to study at any work of mine you must know that this theatrical style of public festivity is not much in my line. I came here

to-night not with any intention of juggling with my knowledge of the sadness and even hideousness that lie at the base of life. I did not come to be amused. I abhor what is called amusement. I came on a matter of business. I wanted to find a particular type which had struck me. I wanted to fix the impression of that type firmly in my mind. It was the merest chance I should find it again here. But the chance was just worth taking. If I did not find it here, I had determined to go to every place of public amusement in London, to the Park, the theatres, everywhere, until I did find it.'

Colthurst paused, raised his head, and looked fixedly at Mary Crookenden. There was a demand in that look. And Mary met the demand. Unwillingly, reluctantly, shrinking under a strong sense of repugnance—still she met it.

'And have you found what you were searching for here—the type, I mean?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said, 'I have found it. This evening has been a triumph for me in a small way.—I am not among the slavish believers in work from the model, you know. The model is all very well for the journeyman part of our business; but there are innumerable things you can never learn from the model. All the most descriptive and delicate effects of gesture, many of the most dramatic revelations of character and emotion, are necessarily evanescent and transient. You must seize them in passing if you are to seize them at all. Therefore I have trained myself to work largely from memory. And so when, as in the case we were just speaking of, I see a type that attracts me,

a face that—that holds an idea for me, action that interests me, I go after it. I do not let it evade me. I have a great deal of patience, but in the end I hunt it down. I possess myself of it.' Colthurst's handsome hands played oddly with the folds of the cloak. 'I possess myself of it,' he repeated. 'I know every line, every curve, every tone. I master it. I learn it by heart. It belongs to me. It can't elude me even if it would. It grows obedient. It comes when it is called.'

Oh! this bear danced to horrible tunes! This geni towered up to a height altogether giddy and terrific. Mary Crookenden was accustomed to discreet admiration and adulation. She was accustomed to rule her little kingdom according to her passing fancy. She was accustomed to being treated with high respect, consideration, indulgence; to being petted, humoured, given way to. She was accustomed to banish all that disturbed her or offended her taste. In her own circle of society she was privileged and precious. No one took ever her name in vain. And now her little kingdom seemed to have disappeared in chaos. A major force had swept down on it. Her privileges were disregarded. Her poor little throne was in ruins; the conventional props and supports of it had given way altogether. Her courtiers had forsaken her. She was all alone, face to face with a personality larger, stronger, more unrestrained, more dauntless than any she had ever encountered before. She was overcome by a panic of nervous fear.

Had Madame Jacobini and Mr. Carr been within earshot she would have called to them. But the bench

was vacant; they were no longer in sight. She turned and glanced back. Her beautiful eyes were wide with misgiving and angry trouble, wet with something—notwithstanding her wilfulness and little airs of self-reliant grandeur—suspiciously akin to tears. The child, which lives in every true, pure-minded woman till far beyond the age Mary Crookenden had reached, gazed out of her face, simple, unaffected, terrified even, crying out dumbly but very eloquently for comfort, for protection and help.

Just then it happened that the monster fountain in the central basin rushed upward, a vast column of water, breaking, falling, dissipating itself in showers of golden light which irradiated the whole scene. It bathed the girl's fair face and figure as with the outburst of some strange sunset. She stood transfigured in the glow of soft unearthly light, her lips tremulous, her bright image doubled in the water at her feet.

Lancelot Crookenden and Aldham had just loitered down the steps from the terrace.

Colthurst stared at the girl in evident amazement. Then he glanced at the splendid young felllow coming lazily along the alley. He uttered a sharp exclamation. With a turn in the blood, which made him sick and faint for an instant, so that his muscles relaxed and the plush cloak fell in a heap on the gravel about his feet, he recognized them both; while the outward vision of illuminated exhibition gardens, electric lights, elaborate fountains, the hum and measured movement of the London crowd—all the artificial elements of his actual surroundings—gave place to an inward vision of a very different order.—He saw a

steep heather-clad hill, sweeping upward to the cliff edge, the still blue waters of the autumn sea beyond, and, wrapped about with misty sunshine, their shadows lying long across the slope, a sturdy, smooth-faced school-boy, and a little orange and scarlet-clad maiden, pale-cheeked, red-eyed, the sweet evening wind tangling her long fair hair.

There were other human presences in that vision too; but on them Colthurst struggled not to let his remembrance dwell. Indeed, to him the vision was poignantly sad.

To most persons it is doubtfully cheering, I suppose, to meet themselves of five, seven, ten years ago. To Colthurst it was not doubtfully cheering, but quite undoubtedly ghastly, so to meet himself; to look in his own eyes; to hear again his own voice; to dream again those boundlessly ambitious dreams; to have again that sense of leisure, of plenty of time ahead for fulfilment, which goes so far to give youth its enchanting buoyancy of spirit; to feel again that magnificent rage of living which belongs to the hopes and apprehensions of three-and-twenty. Ah! if he could but have wiped out those ten intervening years; wiped out not only the griefs and disillusionments, but even the ripening of talents, the success and renown they had brought him, and be back on that breezy hillside once again! He was torn with passionate longing, passionate regret. But unfortunately the road of life—it is a truism—is so constructed that there is no going back.

'Oh! Lance, Lance, I am so glad you have come!' cried Mary Crookenden. 'I want to find Sara Jaco-

bini. Will you take me to find her? I want to go home.'

She moved close to him, childlike still in look and action, holding out her hands.

'Of course I'll take you,' he answered gladly, soothingly.

Then the goodly youth's manner suffered a singular change. He addressed himself to James Colthurst with a studied insolence, of which Mr. Aldham, for one, would have thought him wholly incapable.

'I will trouble you to give me my cousin's cloak. I see you've dropped it,' he said.

Colthurst stooped mechanically and picked it up. For the moment his power of defiance, of self-assertion, was gone.

'I am much obliged to you,' Lancelot went on, curtly. 'Come, Polly; what way did they go?'

As Miss Crookenden walked away her alarm found expression in words. They were intended exclusively for her companion's ear, but the place was quiet and her grave voice carried.

'What an odious man!' she said. 'He is insufferable; he has no manners. And it is more than that—he is terrible, terrible.'

Lancelot stopped dead in the middle of the path.

'Why, the brute, what has he said? what has he done?' he demanded.

'Nothing—nothing in the world. Oh! my dear Lance, don't you become terrible too!' cried poor Mary. 'Nothing in the world. Do come. Let us find Sara Jacobini. He is only very extraordinary. Oh! pray don't say anything more about it. Really he did

and said nothing one could describe, nothing one could take hold of. It is him, himself.'—Miss Crookenden put her hand through her cousin's arm.—'Come along, dear old boy,' she said. 'It's all right now I have found you. I am afraid I was not quite nice to you just now. Lance, you don't owe me one, do you? You forgive me?'

'Why, yes, of course, Polly,' the young man said, simply. 'Of course, I forgive you.'

And it appeared to Lancelot that the same sun as of old might, after all, rise to-morrow morning.

Mr. Aldham had stayed behind. He felt it due to himself that if other people lost their heads, he should give evident proof that his, at all events, remained quite in its right place on his shoulders. The little scene he had just witnessed appeared to him as precipitate as it was enigmatical. Miss Crookenden's bearing displeased him. It came near being undignified. But that only made him the more anxious to cover the abruptness of her retreat. He addressed a few civil words to Colthurst, expressing a hope that this, though their first, might not prove to be their last meeting. But, I am afraid, Mr. Aldham's attempts at cordiality were not calculated to carry conviction. He was preoccupied. His thin lips were more than usually compressed.

'We must arrive at an understanding—yes or no,' he was saying to himself, while he bade Colthurst good-night. 'This state of uncertainty is not desirable for either of us. We must come to an understanding. We will do so in Switzerland.'

At that unnerving moment of recognition, as Miss

Crookenden's cloak fell to the ground, her sketch-book had dropped out of the pocket of it. It lay now on the gravel at Colthurst's feet. No one but himself had observed it. He stood looking down at it. Should he call Aldham back and give it to him? That seemed an act of humility, an act of service; and Colthurst was very far from inclined towards humility and acts of service just at present. Lancelot's manner, Miss Crookenden's parting words—he had heard them—cut him like a whip. His whole nature was in revolt. He was fiercely indignant with circumstance, chance, fate—either word does equally well and ill—for the very disconcerting practical joke she had played on him. He was indignant, too, with the woman who had been fate's main instrument in the playing of that joke. Why had she gone out of her way to cajole and flatter him? It was purely gratuitous on her part. He had only wanted to stare at her as at some beautiful work of art; and, of its own free-will, the picture had walked out of its frame, the statue stepped down from its pedestal. Smiling, gracious, altogether head-turning, it had approached him. Really it was not his fault, his doing. And then all that he most wished to forget had risen, spectral, sinister, accusing, behind the gracious figure; while the figure itself turned away, leaving him opposite that spectral background—turned away with something very like an insult on its lips.

'Odious, insufferable, mannerless,' Colthurst repeated to himself. 'A pretty list of epithets. I may as well claim the privileges of my disabilities.'

And he stooped down and picked up the sketch-book.

'It may be worth studying,' he said. 'Its contents may help to fix my impression of this particular type.'

BOOK III.—ST. MICHEL-LES-BAINS.

'Très volontier,' repartit le démon. 'Vous aimez les tableaux changeans; je veux vous contenter.'—LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

CHAPTER I.

'BUT, my dearest Mary, I assure you it is nothing on earth but liver.'

The speaker, Madame Jacobini, sat up in her narrow wooden bed and delivered herself of this intimate announcement with much energy of conviction. Her skin was remarkably yellow, and offered a fine contrast to the grey woollen shawl thrown over her head. Madame Jacobini was one of those women who give themselves up to illness with positive generosity. She abandoned all artifice. She surrendered at discretion. She knew the grey wollen shawl made her look frightful. She did not care. Indeed, to look frightful under the circumstances was a sort of satisfaction.

Miss Crookenden, meanwhile, looking very much the reverse of frightful—though her beautiful eyes had a suggestive redness around them, which also slightly invaded her nose and chin—sat on the side of the bed. This young lady was never more engaging, I think, than when in a sentimental humour. She contemplated her companion with an expression of the most artless distress. She sat there the image of delicate

despair. Niobe, at two-and-twenty, in a particularly neat, dust-coloured, beige gown, with a full white silk waistcoat to it!

'You know, Sara,' she said, mournfully, 'if you have not complete confidence in that little French doctor—he looks dreadfully young, though he is so fat—I will telegraph to Baird directly, and tell him to come out.'

'What insanity!' cried Madame Jacobini.

'He could cross by the night boat, and be here to-morrow evening. And I should feel so much easier if he saw you.'

Miss Crookenden's breath caught in a really piteous way, while she furtively dabbed the small square of embroidered cambric she held in one hand against her eyes.

'And pray what fee do you suppose Baird would ask for stepping out here just to tell me to take blue pill?' inquired Madame Jacobini, not without irony.

'Oh, I'm sure I don't know. But what does money matter, Sara, when health is at stake? And I haven't been very extravagant this year. And Uncle Kent wrote and told me, just before we started—you remember?—some more had been paid in. And it wouldn't be possible to spend it better than in securing your comfort, Sara, and—and perhaps saving your life.'—The picture conjured up by her last words so overcame Miss Crookenden that she began to cry in good earnest.—'It would be too horrible to think we hadn't done everything that we could; and if anything happened to you what should I do? oh! what should I do without you?'

'But, my precious child—for goodness' sake don't make yourself so unhappy, Mary.'—Madame Jacobini leaned forward, and possessed herself of one of the girl's pretty hands.—'It is liver, I tell you. Liver, liver, liver,' she repeated, in a rising scale of emphasis. 'Why, this attack is nothing! In old days I have sung at concerts—with Jacobini, poor dear creature, conducting too in a state of nervous irritability that was simply appalling—when I was so giddy the notes on my music sheet hopped up and down as if they were on wires. Everything turned addled-egg colour. The faces of the audience were like an enormous bed of autumn cabbages—every conceivable shade of green and yellow. And when I went back into the artistes' room I fainted dead away, and frightened the soprano nearly into fits. And yet did I die?' she added, with a little grimace. 'Not a bit of it. Depend upon it, Mary, we skinny scare-crows of women, with big mouths, are uncommonly tough. We take a lot of killing.'

Miss Crookenden could not help smiling. But she did so reluctantly.

'I don't believe in foreign doctors,' she remarked. 'They are so rough. They are not sympathetic, and they don't keep their nails clean—at least M. Baraty doesn't. He may give you all sorts of horrible wrong drugs—'

'Because his nails are dirty?' interrupted Madame Jacobini.

'No, of course not, but—'

'But nothing,' interrupted the elder lady again. 'In the long run he will give me just precisely what I

tell him to give me. Why, that is what every sensible person calls in a doctor for—to confirm their own opinion, and prescribe the medicine they have a fancy to take. I know exactly what is the matter with me. The attack has been coming on for the last week. I must have got a chill the day we were at Thonon with your aunt and what you profanely call the Chosen People. Perhaps, dear Mrs. Crookenden's extreme coolness of demeanour gave me a chill—very possibly. Her neighbourhood is extremely suggestive of that of a large patent refrigerator. I was conscious of feeling quite poorly before the afternoon was over. But at the time I put it down to *le spleen*—active irritation induced by the manœuvrings of Lady Alicia Winterbotham in respect of poor Lancelot.'

Madame Jacobini looked hard at Miss Crookenden as she concluded those remarks. But the young lady remained, to all appearance, entirely indifferent.

'Violet Winterbotham is really very nice,' she said. 'She has a lovely mouth. She inherits that from her mother. All the Quayles have lovely mouths. Even Lady Louisa Barking, who is as "biled crow" unto me, a dish I pre-eminently don't "hanker after," has a lovely mouth.'

'Oh! has she?' exclaimed Madame Jacobini. She closed her eyes, and leaned back again the square, squashy pillows with a wide smile, followed by a yawn of proportional dimensions. 'Has she?' she repeated.

There was a silence of some duration. At last Miss Crookenden rose from her seat on the side of the bed. She shook herself gently, getting her dust-coloured skirts into place, stooped down and smoothed the bow

on her left shoe, which was slightly crumpled.—'You really won't let me telegraph for Baird, then?' she asked.

'Good gracious, no!' cried Madame Jacobini, opening her eyes again. 'Certainly not. In a day or two I shall be perfectly well. If it was not for your being alone, I believe I should rather enjoy myself here. Bed is a blessed refuge. To get this unexpected holiday from dressing, and posing, and being agreeable, and making the best of oneself generally, as a self-respecting woman must—oh, it's a prodigious relief! But it really is annoying,' she continued, 'that I should be laid up just now, when the Frank Lorimers are gone. If Mrs. Frank had been here I could have laid in bed with an easy mind. But I don't in the least like your having nobody but Chloe to look after you.'

'Chloe will look after you, not me, please, Sara. I have not the smallest intention of your being left to the tender mercies of that harumscarum French chambermaid.'

'But you can't sit in-doors all day, my dear child.'

'Of course not,' answered the other. 'I shall go out. I shall walk. I shall sketch. I shall be very independent. It will be extremely amusing.'

'But, my dear, you can't go wandering about alone here. To begin with you would feel very uncomfortable, not having an idea how to take care of yourself. And to go on with, we should have half the young men in St. Michel-les-Bains dangling after you, with Mr. Aldham at their head.'

Mary drew herself up.

'Mr. Aldham is not the sort of person who dangles,' she observed, laying a contemptuous stress on the final word.

'No; I must own, I don't believe he is,' the elder woman responded, quickly.—Her indomitable honesty frequently compelled her to eat up her own words thus. She closed her eyes again, and folded her thin hands on the sheet.—'I don't care very ardently about him, you know, Mary. Those very priestly young gentlemen make me a trifle nervous. I can hardly believe the greater part of their saintliness doesn't take off with their long black coats.'

'When we saw Mr. Aldham yesterday he was in flannels,' put in Miss Crookenden.

'Only part of him. It was an ingenious compromise between the world and the Church. Remember that hideous stock and the high black waistcoat. The yoke was still about his neck.'—Madame Jacobini yawned again.—'No,' she went on; 'they do seem to me rather unnatural. A man should not be too obviously good. It is an infringement of our rights, and reverses the proper position of men and women. The woman ought always to be the better of the two. It appears to me that is just what she is made for. And then these young clergymen generally end by going over to Rome—they are Jesuits at heart, every man Jack of them!'

'I am sure Mr. Aldham is not a Jesuit at heart,' said Miss Crookenden.

'And I have often remarked,' Madame Jacobini continued, relentlessly, 'that these super-excellent, saintly people, who are always cracking up asceticism

and self-denial, and who give one the impression they are only fit to associate with the angels, and have consequently the right to be slightly contemptuous towards us lay wretches with all our solicitude over marrying and giving in marriage, usually end by having not only a wife but an enormous family themselves.'

'Really, Sara, I don't think we need go into that,' Mary exclaimed.

A little struggle took place in her between offence and affection. She wished Sara would not say what was inconvenient. She wished particularly she would not do so when she was ill, and it was consequently impossible to be comfortably offended with her. It seemed like taking an unfair advantage of the situation.—'If you are sure you don't want me, I think I'll go out for a walk,' she said, abruptly. She moved away to the door.

Madame Jacobini lay watching the girl, shading her eyes with one hand. Her bright, plain face wore an expression of rather puzzled amusement.

'Mary,' she called out suddenly, 'I am a disgusting coward.'

Miss Crookenden looked back, her hand on the door handle.

'Really!' she said. 'Then you know yourself better than I know you.'

Madame Jacobini made a little grimace.

'Don't be angry, my dear; and come here, please. I want to speak to you. I have had something on my mind for the last three weeks, and it has helped to make me bilious. I knew I ought to admonish you.

What do you keep me for, except to admonish you now and again? And I have not had the moral courage to speak out and have done with it.'

Mary, carrying her head rather high, came slowly back across the shining parquet floor, and stood at the bottom of the bed.

'If you are going to tell me something disagreeable, pray tell it me at once,' she said, calmly.

Madame Jacobini laughed a little.

'You are inimitable,' she exclaimed. 'Yes, it is disagreeable, and we had better get it over as quickly as may be.—My dear, then, do you know you are rather cruel to that unhappy young Jesuit? One day you are mild, and deferential, full of appropriate enthusiasm, and those pretty eyes of yours look unutterable things. The poor creature treads on air. Next day you are as proud as Lucifer—give him the cold shoulder in the most open and ostentatious way. He sinks beneath a sea of lead—or would do so if his self-esteem didn't act cork-jacket and keep him afloat. Now, I hold that flirting, in moderation, is as natural at one time of life as measles at another. All the same I do not think it is quite right to go on first blowing hot and then cold, in this way. You know my opinion of him. He is altogether too irreproachable for my taste. Still, fair play's a jewel, Mary, and no woman, if a man is genuinely in love with her, ought to tease him as naughty children do a mouse with a string to its leg; do you think she ought?'

Miss Crookenden gave a little shudder.

'Was that pity for the mouse or the man?' asked Madame Jacobini, quickly.

'Oh! the mouse,' the young lady answered. 'I wish you would not make use of such illustrations, Sara. I can't bear to think of creatures being hurt.'

'I don't dictate; I don't even advise; I only state the case,' Madame Jacobini said, spreading out her hands. 'If you don't intend to accept him, don't let him propose. With a little honest effort you can easily show him that won't do. If you do intend to accept him, don't plague him. He is not all sweetness and light. He has a long memory. He is one of those immaculate persons whom it is particularly unwise to irritate.'

Miss Crookenden's lofty demeanour had suffered considerable modification during the progress of this conversation. She came round to the bed-side, straightened out the edge of the sheet, and administered sundry pokes to the squashy pillows, bending down meanwhile over her friend. 'Sara, do you think I have behaved very badly?' she asked.

'I think you had better know your own mind.'

'But my mind changes,' said Miss Crookenden, plaintively.

Madame Jacobini smiled, and patted her cheek. 'You must not let it change, my dear. You can be obstinate enough, you know, when you like.'

The girl wiped her eyes, laughing rather tremulously.

'Oh! hang all the lovers,' she said. 'I don't want them. Why, in the name of all that's tiresome, should they want me? I want to be a delightful little old maid like Miss Aldham, and paint great pictures.'

'What a logical combination of desires!' cried

Madame Jacobini. 'If you are a delightful little old maid like Miss Aldham, most decidedly you will never paint great pictures. And if you ever paint great pictures, you will very certainly not end as an old maid of Miss Aldham's pattern. Extremes meet, but not extremes of that sort. The two things are incompatible. To one or other you must wave a long farewell, my dear.'

'But you don't really think you are dangerously ill, Sara?'

'Good gracious, no! of course not.'

Mary wiped her eyes again, hastily.

'I feel foolish,' she said. 'I will go out for a walk.'

When Madame Jacobini was alone she shut her eyes, while her thin, nervous fingers performed a rapid fantasia on the smooth space of the turned-down sheet.

'Dear me,' she said, 'what a hatefully head-achy thing it is to do one's duty! I wish that good youth was at Jericho, high waistcoat, angelic face, and all the rest of it. And then, in addition, to-night our poor, devoted Lancelot arrives here.'

Chapter II.

Behind, like an indented coast-line, running out in cape and headland, sweeping back in inlet and bay, the edge of the pine woods. Below, at the bottom of the great cup formed by the surrounding hills, St. Michel-les-Bains, looking from this over-hanging height like a child's toy town set out on a green table-

cloth. Peeping over the farther rim of the cup, above a range of pink-grey crags, like the white-headed frost giants of Scandinavian legend, out-lying pinnacles and spires of Mont Blanc. All around, the grass of the Alpine pasture splashed with flowers, across which flights of swallow-tail butterflies—vigorous, broad-winged, triumphant creatures, clothed in splendour of iridescent purple and pale gold—chased each other, and whirled upward, in wild Bacchic dance or riotous courtship, high in mid-air.

The sun was so hot that Colthurst, lying on the grass, could feel exactly where the shifting shadow of the pines behind him ended, as the sunshine began to creep up towards his knees. He was just pleasantly tired. For the last three days he had been tramping through the fine country lying south and west of the Rhone Valley. The two lads, who acted as guides and carried his and his companion's modest baggage, had disappeared down the zig-zag path, bordered by barberry bushes thick with scarlet fruit, leading to St. Michel. They shouted, and sang, and yodelled as they ran, stumbling down the sharp descent. Their loud, open-throated music was not supremely harmonious, perhaps; but there was an untamed gaiety in it, born of strong exertion and the freedom and enchantment of these mountain pastures, which Colthurst found very inspiring, as it came to him on the eager breeze that played upon his face and then washed away through the branches of the innumerable pine-trees behind him.

Colthurst was taking a holiday. He had been idle for three weeks. This was the first three weeks' idle-

ness, save the dreary, enforced idleness of illness, he had known since he was quite a small boy. I do not say his holiday had been a period of uninterrupted bliss; but, on the whole, pleasures had far exceeded annoyances during the course of it. The latter had been petty, the former solid, and Colthurst felt well. That small word holds a vast amount of meaning for some of us. Colthurst was among the unfortunates who have sounded the greatness of its meaning. His nerves had grown steady; his vexatious inclination to stammer had, consequently, lessened for the time. The rage of living possessed him in all its delicious fierceness as he lay on the warm grass of the green alp, among the gentians, and salvias, and queer, tall, toad-coloured mountain thistles. His brain was quick with thoughts. He had a great determination of words to the mouth. In short, Colthurst according to his own fashion, was happy. He was ready to go forward along the road of life, not regretfully desperate to go back.

'Don't talk to me about beauty as if it was a thing by itself, a quantity measurable, ponderable, producible or removable at will,' he was saying, 'as if it could be laid on, as a cabinet-maker lays on a veneer of precious wood over a plain deal surface; as if it could be bought and sold, taken hold of, carried about; as if you could put your finger on it and say, Here it is; or on the absence of it, and say, Here it is not. That is a horribly gross, carnal conception of it. Beauty is a spirit, and they that worship it must worship it in spirit and in truth—specially in truth, not in shams, and delusions, and pretences, and fashions, and

affectations, which are precisely that in which the majority always have worshipped it, and always will worship it, I suppose, human nature being what it is, protest as one may. Beauty is the same yesterday, today, and for ever; and yet it is always changing, shifting, showing you a fresh face, revealing itself anew. It is endlessly stable and endlessly fertile. It informs all things, and yet, in a sense, is nothing. You apprehend it more with your intellect than with your eyes. And that is what English people persistently refuse to understand. They are ruining their stage, as they have already ruined their picture-galleries, by the besotted belief that intellect has nothing to do with it; that beauty—which is only another word for art—begins and ends with an appeal to the eyes. We English plume ourselves on our respectability and decency, on avoiding the quagmire of sensuousness into which other nations fall. Only look at the walls of our exhibitions, look at the *mise-en-scene* of our theatres! I declare I believe we are the most sensuous nation on the face of the earth. The appeal is always to the eye, and to what are called the domestic affections. And the domestic affections are the biggest shams out. Legalized sensuousness—that is what the domestic affections amount to if you run them to earth.'

Colthurst delivered himself of this tirade with much vehemence, leaning on his elbow, pulling now and again, in a neatly violent sort of way, at some long jointed grasses growing near him—biting at the white, soft stems when he had wrenched them from

their envelope, and then flinging away the feathery heads of flower.

Mr. Barwell, assistant-master of the Connop Trust Art School, sitting beside him—his spare, Don Quixote-like frame doubled together, his hands clasped about his knees—listened in silent wonder. He was conscious of receiving a series of small electric shocks during the course of the conversation of which the above is a fragment. Ever since he had first encountered James Colthurst, at the hotel at Aigle, about a week ago, a sense of almost reckless adventure had been upon him. He had lived in a condition of repressed excitement, which, in combination with the flies—they abound in the Rhone Valley—had seriously broken his rest of a night. This estimable man, of over fifty, was as fluttered, as anxiously, doubtfully jubilant as a small schoolboy out of bounds, at finding himself in the company of the rising painter.

Mr. Barwell had a tall narrow head, with no particular back to it; a nose which his friends and he himself called aquiline, but which his enemies—had he possessed any, which I cannot believe he did, being the most invincibly inoffensive of men—would probably have likened to the beak of the parrot rather than that of the eagle; and a large amount of sparse, wavy, grey-white whisker. It may be added that he belonged to that charming order of persons—to be found, let it be said, to the honour of humanity, in all departments of art—who, with admirable self-abnegation, are willing to play not second, but twenty-second fiddle, if needs, be, to their most illustrious brother artists all their lives long—the John Baptists

of every-day life, for ever pointing the crowd to one greater than themselves, whose way they prepare without a trace of envy.

Mr. Barwell had an unlimited reverence for genius. It awed and, in a sense, intoxicated him. Genius might exhibit itself under many different forms. Between these forms he did not aspire to discriminate, with any rash placing of higher and lower, on the strength of his own private judgment. He had, of course, heard James Colthurst's work much discussed, during the last few months, by people interested in artistic questions. He had even had the privilege of hearing the well-known Royal Academician who presided over the Connop Trust School deliver judgment on the subject.

'He is an innovator,' that gentleman had said, 'and regards many of our cherished traditions very irreverently. I consider his principles, so far as I can pretend to apprehend them, as erroneous, distinctly erroneous. But he is clever, undeniably—I had almost said diabolically clever.' And the great man had ended up with a laugh, half apologetic, half patronizing.

This speech had recurred frequently to Mr. Barwell's mind during the past week. Erroneous in principle, yet diabolically clever.—It appeared to him his *chef* had hit off Colthurst exactly. This delighted him. It gave him another opportunity of bowing down before the greatness of the said *chef*. It also gave him a convenient phrase behind which to shelter when Colthurst's talk alarmed him by the agitating reforms it proposed, or the exhaustingly wide horizons

it opened out. Mr. Barwell fortified himself with the remembrance that his principles were erroneous, and therefore what he said really did not very much matter. When the magnetism of Colthurst's strong personality, his force and ability, took him by storm and absolutely prostrated him with admiration, he consoled himself for his apparent weakness by remembering that his own particular Royal Academician, the head of his beloved Connop Trust School, had, after all, admitted that this iconoclastic young painter was diabolically clever. The phrase was a support to him now, as he sat on the fragrant grass of the green alp, watching the darting butterflies. Again, it proved a most convenient shelter. He ran in behind it, and took breath, so to speak, whenever a pause occurred in the cannonade of Colthurst's conversation.

The cannonade began again very soon, however, breaking out in rather a new place.

'Beauty lies far deeper than most people are willing to suppose. It consists in the true relation of things to themselves. Everything natural is beautiful.'

'Oh, dear oh, dear!' murmured Mr. Barwell, mildly, under his breath.

He clasped his knees still tighter with his hands; and, by raising his feet tip-toe and then dropping his heels to the ground again, communicated a gentle see-saw motion to his doubled up person. He really had to let off steam somehow.

'Yes, it is,' Colthurst asserted. 'Every action, expression, aspect, rightly understood, is beautiful, in as far as it is spontaneous and according to nature. And by that I don't only mean nature groomed, and

rubbed down, and in magnificent condition, like a prize animal at a show. I am not going back to any mythic golden age for my beauty—not to impossible gods and goddesses in marble.'

'You acknowledge the antique as the basis of instruction, surely?' gasped Mr. Barwell.

'No, not as the basis—most emphatically not as the basis. That is getting hold of quite the wrong end of the stick. Work towards perfection, if you like—if you can—if perfection exists. But to begin with it and work back from it is a self-evident mistake, I should say, contrary to all known laws of development. By setting your students down opposite to those faultless marble impossibilities you create a false standard in their minds. Nature does not come up to that standard; consequently, when you show them nature, they despise her. *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.* Nature is the good; it is an impiety, as well as a stupidity, to discredit her by filling your students' minds with dreams of a non-existent better. The very best life model you can get looks defective after the Apollos, and Venuses, and all those other ill-conducted classic divinities whom it is customary to make such free use of in the education of English youth. The final measure must always be Nature. Why not send your students to her at once? Why use lies, in short, as a preface to the truth And why be afraid to take the truth as a whole?—I find Nature is full of imperfection, failure, pain, of irony, and of humour of a very broad literal kind.

'Well, I accept her unhappy and malign aspects as just as true as her happy and benign ones. After a

tremendous struggle, we have come to understand, thanks chiefly to Turner and Constable—some of the younger men are beginning already to forget or ignore the lesson, though, I am afraid—that rain, and storm, and cloud are at least as beautiful as clear sky and sunshine, the elements at war as beautiful as the elements at peace. Well, I want to carry that understanding farther and deeper. I want to show that, if intelligently looked at, poverty, disease, sorrow, decay, death, sin—yes, I am not much afraid of the word—are ideally beautiful too, paintable too, intrinsically and enduringly poetic.'

Mr. Barwell see-sawed in a kind of mild desperation. He was terrified and yet fascinated.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' he said again; 'but this is revolutionary, Mr. Colthurst. Where would not such views lead to? They are revolutionary, positively revolutionary.'

Colthurst threw away a bitten grass stem, pushed his moustache up from his lip, while a curiously fanatical gleam came into his eyes.

'And why not?' he asked. 'Has it never occurred to you what a lovely thing revolution is—*La Revolution*—she, the person, the spirit, the beast, perhaps—I am not sure which—who wipes off the dust, and makes the rusty wheels turn again, and sweeps away dead ideas, and brings forth living ones; that persistent enemy of stagnation, without whose broom and dust-pan human affairs would be smothered by refuse and cobwebs and eaten out by dry-rot? I don't paint allegorical pictures, you know; but if I were ever deluded enough to attempt one, I would try to put Revo-

lution worthily on canvas, in her blood-red robe, holding a scourge in her hand. She is a divinity much more to my taste than smirking, marble Apollos, or even Raffaelesque Madonnas, dressed, parrot-like, in half the colours of the rainbow.'

The assistant master of the Connop Trust School could not help it, he groaned as he sat in the shadow of the pines, among the gentians, and salvias, and swallow-tail butterflies. Faust, before his transformation, must have suffered just such very upsetting moments whilst listening to Mephistopheles' surprising suggestions in the philosophy of life. Had he not, indeed, possessed the Royal Academician's consolatory phrase to shelter behind during the pauses, I fear the good man would hardly have been able to retain any degree of mental or moral equilibrium at all.

Humour, fortunately, entirely refuses to run in couples with tall-talk. The groan amused Colthurst, and his sense of the slight absurdity of the situation steadied him. Deference and admiration were new and very pleasant to him, particularly when they came from men older than himself. The lionizing to which certain circles of society had subjected him during the past three months had been far from agreeable to him. But for your lionship to be attended by one faithful and profoundly impressed jackal is a totally different thing from your lionship being stared at by a crowd of the professional sight-seers of whom society is so largely composed. Colthurst liked his jackal—was flattered, touched even, by the creature's attentions. He would have regretted extremely driv-

ing it away by the loudness of his roaring—though, I am afraid, he dearly liked roaring too, and that loudly. He took up his parable again, therefore, in an altogether humbler and less aggressive strain.

'It is all very well for me to talk about Revolution,' he said; 'but I shall never make one. That is emphatically a game it takes two to play at—a public to listen and follow, as well as leaders to show the way. In the present case there is no public ready to listen—except for a minute or two, out of passing curiosity—still less ready to follow. The public only listens willingly to those who prophesy smooth things, who coax and cosset it, and assure it that its worship of the domestic affections is the last word of ethics, and religion, and art. The very last thing the public desires is to be asked to use its brains, or to have the stability of its favourite idols called in question. It is the fashion to look at my pictures just now; so the public pays its shilling and goes and looks at them. But what does it make of them? Nothing. Empty it comes. Empty it goes away.'

Colthurst raised himself into a sitting position, resting his hands on the grass on either side of him.

'Oh! it is sickening,' he exclaimed. 'Sometimes it makes me laugh, sometimes it makes me mad, when I think how miserably little my pictures mean to other people, as compared with what they mean to me.'

'No doubt,' Mr. Barwell said, relieved at being able to agree for once. 'But that I suppose is the fate of every artist, in a degree. And yet I think you rather under-estimate the intelligence of the public, Mr. Colthurst, if you will pardon my saying so. In regard to

"The Road to Ruin," for instance, I don't say the public has grasped your meaning to the full, still——'

'"The Road to Ruin"!' Colthurst broke in, glancing sharply, suspiciously at his companion.—But the expression of that gentleman's countenance was guileless, civil, entirely sincere.—'You are quite r-right,' he went on, stammering badly all of a sudden, whispering his words to get them said at all. 'The p-public, even allowing that I under-estimate its intelligence, certainly has not grasped all my meaning. It would have been considerably astonished and frightened if it had. The p-picture meant very much to me. It meant nothing less than salvation or d-damnation. First one, then the other. Now it m-means—why—good Lord!——'

Colthurst sprang to his feet with—so it seemed to much-perturbed Mr. Barwell—a kind of silent black flash, and then stood curiously still.

Out of the pine-wood on the left comes the bridle-path leading down to St. Michel-les-Bains. For a couple of hundred yards it skirts the edge of the pasture, and then turns abruptly down over the hill-side, among the barberry bushes. Along this path came Miss Crookenden and Cyprian Aldham. They were talking, talking too earnestly to be sensible of the presence of the two spectators on the other side of the pasture, in the shadow of the pines. Half-way along the path Mary Crookenden stopped, and stood holding her hat on with one hand, her graceful figure —outlined against the vast panorama of distant hill-side, mountain, and crag—distinct and bright in the strong sunshine. Aldham—Colthurst knew him

again, notwithstanding his flannels—waited beside her. He was talking still. Apparently what he said did not quite meet with Miss Crookenden's approval. She turned away, and walked on along the path. Then at the top of the hill it would seem she repented. She paused among the scarlet-fruited, barberry bushes, making a pretty picture in her light gown and big white hat. Aldham rejoined her. Together they disapeared down the steep descent.

Colthurst's hand had clutched at something in the breast pocket of his jacket. He kept it there as he sat down on the grass again.

'That young lady and gentleman are spending a very agreeable morning, I fancy,' Mr. Barwell remarked, with a touch of gentle irony.

The good man liked to see lovers. He affected to smile at their follies. He really envied them their follies not a little. Two lean, high-nosed Miss Barwells, in a small semi-detached villa at Hampstead, whose united incomes did not exceed seventy pounds a year, had rendered, and would continue to render, love and marriage impossible for him. So Mr. Barwell contented himself with the labours of the Connop Trust School, and admiration of the works and ways of his own particular Royal Academician. He civilly but firmly, these many years, had requested sentiment to keep her distance. But sentiment was not always as obligingly obedient as she might have been. On the present occasion she gave a drag at the excellent under-master's heart-strings, which caused him more than one twinge of delicate pain. And somehow those twinges of pain made him regain his

self-possession. Colthurst's strange, violent personality ceased to dominate him. Mr. Barwell made a return upon himself. He voluntarily took off the distorting, exaggerating, monster-revealing spectacles through which the younger man had insisted upon his looking at the universe; and regarded it once more, just simply and naturally, with his own kindly, modest eyes—eyes focussed to see the good and be dim to the evil; focussed to accept anomalies; focussed not to peer too deep or perceive too clearly, or range in vision too far. It is no mean happiness to be seated in the mean, says the maxim. All excess brings sorrow and disaster; even excess of talent, even excess of truth itself.

And yet I venture to doubt whether Mr. Barwell's return upon himself was voluntary, after all; whether Colthurst had not unconsciously withdrawn his influence, rather than Mr. Barwell consciously emancipated himself from that influence.

'Now it m-means b-both,' Colthurst repeated to himself, finishing off his broken sentence, his eyes fixed on the spot where the path turns so abruptly down over the hill-side—'both, both—as you look at it from one side or the other, heaven or hell.' He put his fingers inside his shirt-collar, and wrenched it outward.—'Don't you think it is about time we went on to St. Michel, and got some food,' he asked, 'and found out what those shouting boys have done with our luggage?'

Chapter III.

Miss Crookenden came in very late for luncheon. At the stair-head of the Hotel et Pension Chabaud the statuesque coloured woman, her dusky, splay-featured countenance sharpened by anxiety, stood waiting to receive her.

'De Lord be praised for de sight of you, Miss Mary, darlin'!' she broke out, volubly. 'Where you bin gone dis long time all alone? Poor Auntie Chloe's looked out of de window, up de street and down de street, till her ole eyes were smarting with watching for you.'

'Oh, I lost my way, and have wandered out of the old world into a new one since I left you this morning,' Miss Crookenden answered, pulling off her hat and gloves and giving them to her nurse. 'I had no end of bother in finding my way home again.'—The girl's smile was rather wan. She went languidly along the wide passage and into her own room. She sat down on the nearest chair.—'In fact, I'm not quite sure I have found my way home even now. Take off my boots, auntie, if you love me, this very minute. How's Madame Jacobini?'

'Oh, she's doin' well enough!'

The ex-slave's allegiance to her young mistress's duenna was of a mitigated and intermittent description. She possessed the high respect for social standing common to her race. 'Ma'am Jacobini only a music-teacher,' she would mumble to herself with a fine flavour of contempt, whenever that lady happened to displease her, or when—as on the present

occasion—Miss Crookenden's affectionate solicitude aroused her jealousy. Now, as she squatted on the floor, unlacing the girl's boots, she grumbled out—'I'm thinking Ma'am Jacobini 'll be 'bliged to find servants of her own to tend her if she's gwine to keep her bed. Chloe's not gwine to 'low de chile she loves better'n anything else in de length and breadth of dis sinful ole earth to go wandering around alone, and coming in looking as white as de snow on de top of de mountains. You've just bin and tired yourself to death, honey.'

Miss Crookenden leaned back in her chair, her hands hanging by her sides, her pretty feet reposing in the old woman's lap, and answered in the same tone of rather melancholy playfulness—'You see it is a very long journey from one world to another between ten o'clock and two, auntie. I am bound to be tired after it, and to feel a little limp. But I shall not take such a journey again for seven whole months,' she added. 'Think of that, auntie—not for seven whole months.'

'De chile's light-headed,' murmured the old woman, peering up over the rim of her spectacles.

'No, the child is only a little heavy-hearted. My patience, me, Chloe,' cried Miss Crookenden, with a sudden revival of animation, 'what a monstrously troublesome world it is!'

Chloe's patient, animal-like eyes gazed up in doting, questioning fondness. Then she fell to rubbing the soles of the girl's feet as she held them in her large brown hands.

'It often 'pears to me,' she said, musingly, 'de best

prayer for all of us, de young as well as de aged, is for de Lord to please to make up de number of His elect and hasten His coming. Dat's de only sartin cure for de troubles of dis yeah world, Miss Mary, darling. I 'low de judgment-day 'll be de brightest day dat ever dawned for a mighty 'mount of folks down yeah.'—The rubbing ceased abruptly.—'Why, if der isn't a little hole in de toe of your stocking, honey!'

'There must be holes in somebody's stockings,' Miss Crookenden rejoined, in a tone of somewhat discouraged philosophy.

'But not in yours,' the old woman said, with decision. 'Let Chloe put you on another pair, and get you your white silk wrapper, and you lie down on de sofa and eat de leastes little bit of chicken, and go to sleep till tea-time.'

These suggestions were not, it must be owned, wholly unattractive to the young lady. The 'leastes little bit of chicken,' followed by slumber, appealed to her as a more feasible and less agitating remedy for her present exhaustion than its apparent alternative —a hurrying on of the Day of Judgment.

'But Madame Jacobini?' she said.

'Never you trouble about her. She's doin' well enough. De doctor said she was to be kep' quiet.'

The old woman spoke crossly. It was evident that she, anyhow, entertained no fears regarding the invalid's eventual restoration to her usual health and vivacity.

The Hotel et Pension Chabaud must have formerly been a country house of considerable pretensions. It

stands in a large garden on the outskirts of the pretty, warm, yellow-and-white Savoy town. Tradition, indeed, reports that it has the honour of occupying the site of a Roman villa. For, notwithstanding its distinctly Christian name, St. Michel-les-Bains has an aroma of classic antiquity hanging about it. It possesses a Roman arch, a good deal the worse for wear, as any one visiting the public park can testify. An ambitious local archæologist is under the glad impression, moreover, that he has discovered traces of a temple, probably of Mercury, in the stable-yard of M. Garin, *diligence* proprietor. While the indications of Roman baths are so incontestable, that the visitors to the *Etablissement Thermal,* when standing mournfully before their tall glasses of really terrible mineral water, may support themselves with the thought that they are not alone in their misery. Gentlemen in togas, and ladies in flowing robes and sandals, nearly two thousands years ago, stood dismally as they are standing, hesitated, gulped, retched, even as they do; and no doubt agreed that this liquid horror must be extremely efficacious, since it is so unspeakably nasty.

Miss Crookenden's sleep did her good. At five o'clock she had a little tea-party under a large mulberry-tree in the garden aforesaid. It was really hot. Caterpillars let themselves down by silken threads into the milk-jug, and wasps invaded the honey-pot. Yet the tea-party was pleasant. Lancelot Crookenden had arrived. His cousin was, perhaps, a little surprised at her own gladness at his advent.

He drove up in a small one-horse carriage, of dimensions distinctly inadequate to the length of his legs,

side by side with Simond Caillet, the guide—the latter smoking a long black pipe with imperturbable composure and holding a couple of ice-axes across his knees.

St. Michel is not much in touch with the more serious side of Alpine experience. The arrival of this handsome young Englishman, just back, so said the gossips, from a series of *grandes ascensions,* threw the hotel into a flutter of excitement. The *concierge* let down the steps of the little carriage with a flourish, as though receiving royalty. Madame Chabaud herself, neat, plump, active, outwardly soft as silk, inwardly—save where the three-year-old son and heir of the house of Chabaud was concerned—harder than the nether millstone, appeared in the doorway, heading a numerous contingent of servants. A German-Swiss family, large alike in numbers and in personal proportions, leaned out over a balcony on the first floor to see the show. A shrill-voiced American child called out to its faded-looking mother, 'Oh, my, mammah! ain't his face a colour!' in perfectly audible accents. And some English girls, in ill-fitting 'shirts' and short petticoats, stopped in the middle of their game of lawn-tennis with the mystic words 'Two, love,' on their lips. St. Michel did not produce many lawn-tennis-playing young men. They saw at a glance this young man must play lawn-tennis magnificently. But would he play it with them? Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Perhaps he might. They darted and skipped over the coarse sun-scorched grass on either side the net with renewed vigour.

Miss Crookenden was in a slightly sentimental humour. She lent herself graciously to the enthusiasm of the moment. And then it was undeniable that Lancelot looked very gallant in his slouched hat and rough mountaineering garments, fumbling in his pockets for a most unnecessary amount of coin—he had a natural instinct for over-paying—as he stood beside the little carriage.

'Good-bye, Simond,' he said to the guide. 'Take good care of yourself till I come back again. Give my kind regards to your wife and those jolly children when you get home. I am awfully sorry this is our only job together for this season.'—He took off his hat with a politeness which moved even the nether-millstone heart of Madame Chabaud. She felt such a young gentleman would confer splendour on her establishment. She thanked Heaven he had not gone to the Hotel des Comtes de Savoie, in the market-place. It would have poisoned her with envy.—'I believe you expected me,' he said. 'My name's Crookenden. I believe some ladies who are staying here have kindly engaged a room for me.'

And then all Launcelot's soul leapt into his quiet eyes, for over the landlady's plump shoulders farther back in the dimness of the hall, he perceived Mary Crookenden, wonderfully fair and distinct, stately even, it seemed to him, among this common-place company.

'Yes, everything is settled, Lance,' the young lady said. 'Madame Chabaud knows; don't you, Madame Chabaud?'

'*Parfaitement, mam'selle.*' Then sharply,—

'Pierre, montez les bagages de monsieur au numero vingt-deux.'

'It's awfully good of you, Polly, to come and meet me,' Lancelot said. He followed his cousin out into the garden.

'How could I help coming to claim relationship with my illustrious cousin before all the admiring throng? It's not every day we have a chance of welcoming a hero, you know, Lance, in our family. Come over there into the shade. Chloe has ordered tea for us—out of doors, under a tree, for a treat, as if we were two good little children in pinafores.'

To Lancelot's ears his cousin's gaiety did not ring quite true. Now he saw her in the light, it struck him she was not looking well. She was 'all eyes,' as the nursery phrase runs.

'Mon Dieu, quel adorable jeune homme!' murmured a French lady of an emotional order of mind as the cousins passed the rustic seat on which she reposed, supported by a wicked-looking black poodle and yellow-covered novel. *'Il ressemble à ces amours de gladiateurs qui s'égorgent les uns les autres dans le grand tableau de Léon Vegrier, au Salon.'*

The English girls also made their comment—'Oh! he belongs to her, then!' laying great stress on the second pronoun. They began to handle their racquets in a dispirited fashion. However well the new-comer might play lawn-tennis, they entertained a sad conviction he was not at all likely to play it with them on the present occasion.

'I've had a splendid trip,' Lancelot said, as he munched the crisp rolls. 'What an awfully nice mul-

berry-tree! It's like an enormous umbrella. Do you often have your tea out here, like this, Polly?—I wish I could have come for longer, but my mother made rather a worry, don't you know, of my going away from Thonon at all. She said it broke up the party. But, you know, between ourselves, it was rather slow at Thonon. There was literally nothing to do. And really they were such a pack of women. I don't want to be rude, but there were—three, four, six of them—to Winterbotham and me. And that is a little severe, you know.'

'I think Violet Winterbotham very pretty,' said Miss Crookenden, with a certain decision.

'Oh! I dare say. Everybody says so, and so of course she must be. There's a fly in your tea-cup; let me fish him out, Polly. I'm so sorry Madame Jacobini's seedy. Is Aldham still here?'

'He goes to-morrow,' Miss Crookenden said, bending her head to watch the fly slowly cleaning off drops of sugary tea as it staggered over the table-cloth. 'Tell me some more about your mountaineering, Lance.'

'Oh, it was first-rate!' he replied.—It may be noted, in passing, that the news of his friend, Cyprian Aldham's impending departure by no means depressed Lancelot. He bore up under it remarkably well.—'I wish I could take you up a big mountain some day, Polly,' he went on. 'You would like it. You'd make a lot out of it. It's too splendid up there, with the miles of ice and snow, and the shifting cloud. The air makes you feel as if you'd had a bottle of champagne. And yet somehow, it all makes you feel aw-

fully religious too. It's all so big, and solemn, and strong, you know.'

Lancelot held out his hand for another roll. Mary gave him one. He didn't know when he had tasted such delicious rolls. He didn't know when he had been in such excellent spirits. A tea-party under the dappled shade of a mulberry-tree was an invention little short of celestial. Lancelot beamed.

'I believe I should be a wonderfully good fellow if I could do a big mountain about once a month,' he remarked between the mouthfuls.

'I think you are a wonderfully good fellow as it is, Lance,' Miss Crookenden said, very gently.

Lancelot's hand, roll and all, stopped half-way to his mouth. 'Polly,' he began, with a sort of quiet desperation. But Miss Crookenden was absorbed in the fly again.

'There, he's cleaned his wings,' she said—'has quite unglued them. He's wiping his face with his forelegs in the most fascinating way now. He can turn his head right round, Lance, as if it was on a pivot, and look down his own back. Don't you wish you could look down your own back?'

Miss Crookenden glanced at the young man without raising her head. Her expression was as gentle as her voice had been a minute ago, when she told him he was a wonderfully good fellow. She smiled at him. Her smile was full of kindness, of very sincere affection. All the same it was a smile preaching restraint rather than encouragement.

'Dear old boy, have some more tea?' she said; 'you go on telling me about your mountains. I like to hear

about your mountains—though I am always rather nervous about you. You are careful, Lance? You're not rash?'

'Oh, no! I'm not rash.'—Lancelot held his head high for a minute. He wanted to get the better of a certain shaking of the solid ground of his innermost self—so to speak. Then he drank his third cup of tea. A good general does not despise details. The minor means, after all, generally make or mar success. Lancelot's supreme desire was not to annoy his cousin. He would understand and obey her, even if it were to his own hindrance. It is seldom, I fancy, that any human being thus really and practically loves another better than himself.

'Look here, Polly,' he said, presently: 'I've just remembered I got something for you as we were going up yesterday morning. It was growing in a little corner of black rock, above a big snow field, just at the beginning of the *arête*. It was rather a nasty place, with a sort of absence of things in general on both sides of you, which made you rather wonder, just at first, why on earth you'd ever been such a fool as to come. It seemed rather queer to find a flower so far up. Nice and brave of the little chap to grow there all alone, and do his level best to make things cheerful; don't you think so?'

Lancelot opened his silver cigar-case, and took out of it a tiny plant of *soldanella alpina,* with fringed purple flower-bells and round green leaves.

'Ah! what a little darling!' cried Miss Crookenden. She stooped down and looked at it closely as it lay in his open hand. The blonde head and the black one

were very near together just then. The girl's pale cheek almost touched the young man's sunburnt one —or would have touched it had not Lancelot drawn back quickly. The western sun streamed in under the spreading branches of the mulberry-tree, and lit up Mary's hair as she leant forward, turning it into a maze of dusky gold.

'Do you like it?'

'Of course I like it. But what became of the beloved cigars?'

'I don't remember. I suppose I threw them away, or Caillet had them. There—take your flower, Polly. I'm so glad you think it pretty. But I wish there had been something better to bring you. I wish I was a clever fellow, and then I could put all I saw into words, and please you that way, but—'

'Dear Lance, you couldn't please me more than you do,' Miss Crookenden said, rather hurriedly.

She looked up, smiling.

'*Voilà Satan qui entre dans le paradis!*' the emotional French lady murmured just then. From her station on the rustic bench she had watched the progress of the little tea-party with the deepest interest. As she spoke the poodle curled up his lips, showing all his white teeth in a vicious flash. The voices of the English girls came plaintively from the tennis-court, accompanied by the dull smack, smack of the racquets against the flannel-covered balls.—'Two, love—three, love—fault! No, it wasn't! Yes, it was out of court! Three love, fault!' they cried.

And Mary Crookenden looked up smiling—looked up to see Colthurst's dark figure coming quickly to-

wards her, past the tennis-court, past the Frenchwoman and the grinning poodle, past a bed of rather starved crimson begonias, his shadow lying like a long ink-blot on the sun-scorched grass before him as he moved.

Miss Crookenden ceased to smile. She drew herself up haughtily. Lancelot, remarking the change in her, turned his head.

'Great Scott!' he said, under his breath, and his fingers closed hard on the plant of soldanella, sadly bruising its fairy bells.

He rose to his feet, pushing aside his chair, and waited, towering above the tea-table, largely, if silently, on the defensive. Mary was behind the table, on the side away from Colthurst. He was glad of that. He could see she was extremely annoyed. He was glad of that too.

She looked very straight at the new-comer, as if demanding an explanation of his presence. It would have been difficult to offer a more discouraging reception than was offered by these two charming young people just then. Colthurst perceived that clearly, yet he came on into the dappled shade of the mulberry-tree.

'I m-must apologise for intruding upon you, Miss Crookenden,' he said, 'b-but I have some p-property of yours to restore to you.'

'Indeed!' the young lady answered, icily.

Colthurst had an excess of stammering. He had been thrown off his balance by the sight of Lancelot. That was wholly, disagreably, unexpected. After the episode of the morning he had reckoned on finding the

young lady in more amenable company. It was only by sheer force of will that he could master that wretched stutter sufficiently to go on speaking at all. He was at a horrible disadvantage. And these two charming young people, who had so lately been deeply concerned in the fate of a fly, did nothing to help him. They were merciless—from their own point of view were not only justified, but absolutely right in being merciless. The minor paradoxes life presents are really cruel. In face of them shall one laugh or cry? I don't know. Any how, Colthurst did go on speaking.

'I found this when you left the exhibition, that night,' he said, drawing out the holland-covered sketch-book. 'It must have fallen out of the p-pocket of your cloak. I did my b-best to return it to you before leaving London. I called at your house, but I was told you had gone abroad. I b-brought it with me, because I thought it just p-possible I might have an opportunity of giving it to you.'

Mary was really pleased at the recovery of her sketch-book. Unconsciously she softened slightly. She rose, and extended her hand to take it. But Lancelot intervened. He put her hand gently aside, and took the book from Colthurst himself. He tried honestly not to be unnecessarily disagreeable, but his manner was offensive from the very carefulness of its civility, as he said—'I'm sure my cousin's extremely obliged to you. I'm sure we are very much indebted to you for giving yourself so much trouble. Thanks.'

A kind of spasm of rage passed across Colthurst's face; but he had come here for quite other purposes

than making a scene with this thick-skulled, thick-witted, young barbarian. He had sufficient self-control not even to look at Lancelot. His only safety, under the circumstances, lay in ignoring him altogether. So he addressed himself to Miss Crookenden again, a strange touch of humility, of pleading, like that of some dumb creature asking sympathy and toleration, in his expression.

'I was d-determined to give it back to you myself, because I wanted to speak to you about your drawings. You must allow me to tell you they are very able—remarkable even. I have a good deal of experience in this matter. I know what I am saying. I have a right to express an opinion.'

Colthurst put two fingers inside his collar and wrenched it outward.

'I am not indulging in any banal attempt at flattery,' he went on. 'Art is altogether too serious to me for me to use it as an excuse for p-pretty speeches to you or any one else. I detest the whole race of dilettante amateurs who play with it, and try to make capital in society out of an imaginary taste for it. Most amateurs' drawing and painting is a mere expression of personal vanity, a bid for applause from persons as ignorant and trivial-minded as themselves. They are an unmitigated nuisance. They, and their paltry caricatures of nature, bring art into contempt.' —The words were beginning to come. Colthurst was warming to his work. He was beginning to make himself felt—to dominate the situation. Miss Crookenden was attentive. Her eyes were growing responsive, dilating, deepening in colour.—'But with you it is dif-

ferent. You have got the root of the matter in you. You have a true gift. You ought to study. If you don't know this already, you ought to know it, and therefore I have come here to tell it you. You must study. It will be culpable of you if you neglect to study, possessing, as you do, a distinct gift.'

He spoke in a tone of authority. Miss Crookenden was not, as a rule, particularly amenable to authority, yet she listened. Lancelot listened also. He was profoundly annoyed.

'Upon my word, Mr. Colthurst,' he broke in, 'you seem to me to be taking—'

But Mary stopped him, laying her hand for a moment on his arm.—'Be quiet, dear old boy,' she said, gravely. 'It is kind of Mr. Colthurst to tell me this. You don't quite understand.'

'You are quite right; I don't,' he answered, turning half away.

For once Lancelot ceased to be submissive to his cousin and his love. He was displeased.

Colthurst watched her, meanwhile, in his quick, restless, oddly violent way.

'D-don't wrap your talent up in a napkin, Miss Crookenden,' he said, stammering again. 'It is horribly d-dangerous to do that. The talents we have and refuse to use, mortify, putrefy, taint all our lives with a hateful death-scent of failure and regret.'

Mary Crookenden was very beautiful just then. Her lips smiled, her eyes positively blazed. But her beauty was a trifle hard, perhaps. The strength of the woman's nature, not its sweetness, was evident.

'You believe I might really do something worth doing—that I might make a mark, in fact,' she said.

She looked full at James Colthurst, and he looked back steadily, daringly, intently, for a perceptible space of time. The girl's face kept its pure waxen whiteness. It was the man who flushed.

'Yes,' he said, 'I believe you may make a mark. I am almost prepared to say you may be famous—if you like.'

Then he bowed to her, still ignoring Lancelot, and passed from the shade of the spreading mulberry-tree, away across the sun-scorched grass again.

'Et voilà Satan, qui s'en va!' murmured the Frenchwoman. *'Chut! Scipio, chut!'*—this to the poodle, who curled up his lips and showed his teeth.—*'Je me demande si la belle Anglaise vient de mordre dans le fruit défendu, ei si elle en donnera à son amour de gladiateur? Mon Dieu, c'est amusant, comme le diable se mêle de tout!'*

'Fifteen, love—game!' cried the girls from the tennis-ground. One of those who had lost threw down her racquet petulantly.—'It's no use playing when she's out here,' she said. 'She is so very smart and superior. She always makes me lose. I wonder who that new man is who's been talking to her! He's the third to-day.'

Between the cousins there was a long silence. Mary sat down again. She was very quiet, looking up absently at the branches and glossy leaves overhead, still smiling a little, still with a great light in her eyes. All the latent ambition had been stirred into activity within her. The possibilities of life had grown au-

gust, imposing. She had always been impatient of restrictions, of mediocrity. She had always wished, and tried, too, in a hundred little ways, to differentiate herself from the ordinary run of social young womanhood. She had struggled to rise from the ranks. And now, so it seemed to her, she had been presented not only with a commission, but with a field-marshal's baton. The assurance that she had the capacity of emerging, that she 'could an' if she would,' was superb to Mary Crookenden. It filled her heart to overflowing with proud gladness. 'I am almost prepared to say you may be famous—if you like' —the words rang through her like a trumpet-call. They dazzled her imagination, dazzled, too, her self-love. To her they were fraught with tremendous issues. Are such magnificent hopes and sensations, indeed, among the results of tasting the forbidden fruit?

'Where did you say Aldham had put up?' Lancelot inquired, abruptly.

The question, and the tone in which the young man asked it, jarred upon Miss Crookenden.

'I am not aware that I made any statement as to Mr. Aldham's place of "putting up,"' she replied. 'I believe he has got rooms at the Hotel des Comtes de Savoie. It is in the market-place. Are you going to see him?'

'Yes; if you don't want me for anything, I think I shall go and see him.'

Lancelot spoke in a curiously quiet, dogged manner.

'Shall you dine with him?'

'Yes; if you don't want me for anything, I shall stay and dine with him.'

'Oh, very well,' said Miss Crookenden. 'I dare say that will be the best arrangement. I shall be free to spend the evening with Sara Jacobini, then. We may as well go. Please give me my sketch-book.'

But Lancelot did not immediately accede to her request. He stood fidgeting with the tea-things in a way which Miss Crookenden found remarkably purposeless and provoking—pushing his cup and saucer back from the edge of the table till they ran into and nearly overset the honey-pot, which in its turn bore down upon the unhappy fly, just nicely recovered from his semi-drowning, and able to apply his mind to the interests of fly-life in a comfortable spirit again, and caught him by three legs under the bottom rim of it. The fly showed fight, kicking out his remaining legs, beating the air with ineffectual wings. But Fate, in the shape of the glass honey-pot, was heavy-handed. She held him fast.

'Upon my word, Polly,' Lancelot said, slowly, unconscious of the struggling fly, though gazing at the honey-pot, 'I don't at all fancy your having back this book.'

'Why not?' demanded Miss Crookenden.

'Well, it's been in that fellow's pocket or portmanteau for the best part of a month. And—well—I'd rather you had nothing more to do with it.'

'Lancelot!' she cried. And for once, whether from anger or from some more subtle feeling, Mary Crookenden blushed.

The young man pushed the cup and saucer and

honey-pot a little farther. The fly reeled off with a frantic buzz, minus a couple of legs.—'You told me not to interfere. I promised I wouldn't. But it's no good. I don't like your getting mixed up with that man and people of his sort. I know I can't prevent your knowing whom you choose—'

'No, you can't. I am glad you recognise that fact,' Miss Crookenden said.

Lancelot continued looking helplessly into the honey-pot. He preferred his long-ago boyish complaint against his cousin.

'You see you really are awfully changeable. One never knows where to have you. You said yourself that fellow Colthurst was insufferable when we saw him that night with Carr—you remember. He seemed to me just as insufferable just now, rather more so, in fact. But you let him spout away as much as he pleased. I can't make it all out. I'd do anything in the world to please you, Pollly—you know that—but I can't pretend to like, to approve—don't you know—when I don't.'

'Have we arrived at the end of the recitals of my misdeeds?' Mary asked, loftily. 'I hope so. Pray let us end this perfectly useless discussion. Go and dine with Mr. Aldham. I trust his conversation may have a soothing effect upon you, and that you may be little less aware of my errors and a little less didactic when we meet to-morrow. Good-bye, Lancelot.'

As she finished speaking, Mary stooped down to pick up her parasol, which lay at the foot of the mulberry-tree. She was very much ruffled, and consequently, I suppose, did not pay much heed to her

movements. For in stooping she struck her forehead sharply against the projecting stump of a sawn-off branch. Such absurd, childish little accidents are fatal to airs and graces, to superiority and grandeur. The blow made her cry out involuntarily and brought tears into her eyes.

At the sound of that cry Lancelot's heart melted within him—'Polly, Polly,' he said, 'oh! you're not hurt?'

He made her sit down again, picked up her parasol—muttering something about that 'blasted stump'—stood over her altogether gentle, solicitous, distressed.

'Dear Lance, why will you be odious and quarrel with me?' Mary asked, turning the tables upon the unlucky youth with truly feminine unscrupulousness and despatch.

'I don't want to quarrel with you, if you're not hurt,' he answered, inconsequently. 'Tell me, Polly, are you sure you're not hurt?'

'Oh, no, not at all—not much; at least, it was only a knock.'—Miss Crookenden rubbed her eyes. She knew that was undignified. But she was sitting upon her pocket, the small square of embroidered cambric was inaccessible, and the tears did tickle so!—'It will be all right directly,' she went on. 'I'll get Chloe to put some *eau-de-Cologne* on it. Lance, are you all nice and good again? You're not cross? We were having such a dear little time.'

'I know that,' said poor Lancelot.—He drew himself up, opening his fine chest, taking a deep breath. He wondered, in passing, if the girl the least measured what she caused him to endure when she made tender,

intimate little speeches like that? Of course she didn't—'Here, give me your rattle-traps,' he said, 'and let's go after Chloe and the *eau-de-Cologne*. You mustn't wait, or the bruise may come out.'

Lancelot carried his cousin's parasol and hat and gloves in-doors, and delivered them over to the old coloured woman in the wide corridor up-stairs. He lingered, just a minute, before betaking himself to number twenty-two, to put on more civilized garments. Perhaps Mary might suggest some modification of plan for the evening. But she neither suggested fresh plans nor did she ask again for her sketch-book. As Lancelot washed and brushed and smartened himself up, he tried to derive satisfaction from the latter fact. This is a world, he reflected, in which you must learn to set one thing against another.

As to the tiny plant of *soldanella alpina* and its fringed fairy bells, the waiter swept it into the slop-basin, along with the maimed fly, and the crumbs, and the cup-rinsings, when he came to clear away the tea-things. Beauty, too often, wanders into very queer company when once it begins to wander from home.

Chapter IV.

Madame Jacobini was restless. Do what she would, she could not settle off to sleep. Miss Crookenden had bidden her good-night. Mrs. Chloe had taken leave of her also, after providing her with a night-light set in a washing-basin. Madame Jacobini was funnily old-fashioned in many of her habits, and derived a

peculiar sense of security from this, to most persons, very lugubrious form of nocturnal illumination. The voices and footsteps had grown silent in the garden. The electric bells had ceased to issue their urgent, irritable summons. The Hôtel et Pension Chabaud was sinking into slumber. Even Madame Chabaud herself, laying aside her vigilance with her high-bosomed stays, hung in dishabille and in weak maternal adoration over the crib wherein reposed the hope of the house—fat, rosy, warm, dimpled, his brown head shaved nearly as smooth as a billiard-ball, and his thumb stuck in between his pouting lips. The seventy odd *pensionnaires* were, presumably, reposing, like the youthful Chabaud, horizontal in their respective beds. 'Sleep and oblivion,' apparently, 'reigned over all.'

But they did not reign over Madame Jacobini. Though horizontal in body, she was vexatiously upright, active, discursive in mind. She was nervous and feverish. She was possessed by the idea, vague yet persistent, that 'something was wrong.' Mary had been silent and distrait during the short time she passed with her that evening—had insisted on reading aloud scraps from a four days' old 'Morning Post,' on the plea that this species of entertainment would be less fatiguing to the invalid than talking. Madame Jacobini was a great talker, and, like most great talkers, detested being read to—specially when the reading in question took the form of snippets of stale news.

Her bed seemed as hot as St. Lawrence's gridiron. She turned first on one side, and then on the other;

arranged and rearranged her shawls; counted imaginary sheep getting through an imaginary gap in a non-existent hedge, and indulged in other desolating mental narcotics of a like nature; yawned; wondered if anything really was wrong; wondered why Lancelot had gone off to dinner with Cyprian Aldham—(Was that the result of a sudden fit of discretion on his part or on Mary's? Of course, it was just as well such a striking pair as the two cousins should not appear alone at *table d'hote*, the seventy odd *pensionnaires* all eyes, and ears, and comments, and surmises, looking on)—yawned again; wondered whether she should have fortitude enough to drag herself out of bed to-morrow, and mount guard over that tiresomely striking-looking pair; dozed a little at last, only to start into more vivid wakefulness than ever at a rustling against the door.

'Who's there?' she cried.

If burglars were roaming about the Hôtel Chabaud, they might as well know she was awake, any how.

'Sara,' Miss Crookenden's grave voice answered, softly, 'may I come in?'

'Something is wrong,' Madame Jacobini remarked, with conviction. 'Yes, by all means come in.'

Mary was wearing a soft, white, Indian silk dressing-gown, plentifully trimmed with Valenciennes lace. It had flowing sleeves to it, that nearly touched the ground on either side. Thus arrayed, the girl looked singularly tall, slight, transparent even, in the vague light of the night-light, as she came forward across the bare parquet floor.

'It is too idiotic,' she said, 'but I have got the fid-

gets. I don't feel as though I could stay in my room alone. One of those German-Swiss women is snoring in the most appalling way next door. She would waken the dead.'—Mary moved across, put aside the muslin curtain, and looked out of the half-open window into the still summer night. Away across the garden she saw one dot of crimson light; it moved, now and again, up and down. It must be just under the mulberry-tree. She had a sudden conviction Lancelot was sitting there, smoking a midnight cigar. —'And I am not dead,' she went on, almost impatiently. 'I am quite execrably alive to-night.'

'So am I,' replied Madame Jacobini, from her hot bed. 'There must be something in the air which causes insomnia. You were quite right to come; we'll work off the fidgets together.'

'Sara,' Miss Crookenden said presently, 'do you mind my telling about something very provoking that has happened?'

'No, my dear, not the least. I am so uncomfortable in any case that a little more or less will make no difference. I am exactly in the humour to hear what is provoking.—I knew it!' she added to herself.

'This morning, when I was out walking, I met Cyprian Aldham. He asked me to marry him.'

Madame Jacobini opened her mouth wide, and brought her teeth together with a snap. The room was so far dark that she could afford to give this highly inelegant vent to her feelings.

'And you refused him!' she said.

'No, I didn't.'

'Good heavens!' cried Madame Jacobini.

She sat bolt upright in bed, while her shadow in profile—a little head and enormous, formless body, outstretched hands, and crooked, snake fingers—leapt up the wall beside her to the cornice.

'You accepted him, Mary?'

'No, I did not do that either. I temporized. I considered dear Miss Aldham—I know how she wishes it. I considered a number of things. And then it is so difficult to say no, point-blank, unless you dislike a person very much. And I don't dislike Mr. Aldham. In some ways I like him really very well.'

'Ardent!' ejaculated Madame Jacobini.

'I asked him to wait until next April. We always go to Brattleworthy in April. I told him I would give him a final answer then.'

'Dear me!' said the elder woman. She meditated in silence for a few minutes. 'And have you any idea what your final answer will be, may I ask? It is a little hard, perhaps, to keep a man on tenterhooks for seven months, and give him an unfavourable answer at last.'

'Oh, seven months is a long while, and I may never have to answer at all! A thousand things may happen in seven months. The Last Day, which poor, dear Auntie Chloe is always on the watch for, may have come first.'

'Don't be profane,' said Madame Jacobini.

Mary leaned her fair head against the window-frame, and looked out at the dot of crimson light away in the darkness of the garden.

'I suppose in the end I shall marry him. I suppose eventually I must marry. And he will do as

well as any one else—better in come respects. I know his people, and like them, and they like me. He is a gentleman; he is by no means stupid, and he is very good-looking in a certain style.'

'White-ivory-paper-knife style,' murmured Madame Jacobini.

'And he is a good man,' Miss Crookenden went on. 'I don't agree with you, Sara, about the relative degrees of virtue in men and women. I should prefer marrying a man I could look up to. I don't want to lead; I would rather be led.'

'Eh, eh!' said Madame Jacobini, her eyebrows going well up into her hair.

'And he intimated to me that he had—could have, anyhow, very shortly—plenty of money. He evidently wished me to understand, further, that there was no doubt that eventually Aldham Revel would belong to him. It is a lovely place. He let me know all this very nicely,' she added, as though wishing to be perfectly just in her statement, 'really very nicely indeed. But he did seem to think these rather important items. I wonder if he thought they would influence my decision!'—She paused.—'Perhaps he was wise,' she said, quietly, dispassionately. 'Perhaps they will.'

Madame Jacobini gave no verbal expression to her feelings. But she was distressed all the same.

The crimson dot was no longer visible. Lancelot—there was no mistaking his height, his bulk, and lazy swinging walk, even in the present almost-dark out-of-doors—came across the garden, humming softly, under his breath, the air of a certain popular setting of

Burns's 'Mary Morison.' He dawdled slowly across the gravel in front of the hotel, his hands thrust well in his pockets.

> 'Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace
> Wha for thy sake wad gladly dee?'

These words of the last verse of the song were just audible. The young lady standing at the open window on the first floor drew back. One of her flowing lace sleeves caught in the handle of the casement, causing it to swing against the wall with a rattle. Lancelot stopped humming his love-song, and glanced up. The light of the gas lamps on either side of the hotel door fell on his smooth, sunburnt, upturned face. I am not prepared to say that Lancelot's countenance lent itself to any remarkable range of expression. Its habitual expression was undoubtedly one of placid, sweet-tempered, rather sober well-being, the natural outcome of his simple, harmonious, unexacting disposition. To-night—or perhaps his cousin only fancied so, being a little pertubed in spirit herself—his expression was wistful, even sad. Disentangling her lace sleeve, Mary moved farther from the window, sat down by the round table in the centre of the room, and rested her head on both hands. The place where she had struck her forehead against the branch of the mulberry-tree throbbed and ached.

'Yes, Sara,' she said, 'Mr. Aldham gave me definitely to understand that he "had two coats and everything handsome about him." So, if marry I must, I had really better marry him; don't you think so?'

But in truth, Madame Jacobini was at a loss what

to think just then. She was still distressed. She was also perplexed. She reflected, as she had often reflected before, that the members of the rising generation are rather incomprehensible. They are too wise, too acute, far too reasonable. They look at life, its offers and its limitations of happiness, in such a strangely judicial fashion. Miss Crookenden's calm appraising of the man she professed herself more than half prepared to marry, struck the elder woman as painfully sensible, cold-blooded, dreary. Had the girl got no heart? Or was her heart unawakened as yet? Or was she doing violence to her heart out of some fantastic, mistaken sense of obligation? Madame Jacobini was filled with vague alarms about her, vague impulsive longings to warm her into more generous, joyous existence.

'Come here, Mary,' she cried, holding out her arms, while the shadow took another leap up to the cornice. 'You look like some ghostly moonbeam in that white dressing-gown, a moonbeam that has gone astray and turned itself into a woman; and I have never liked the moon or anything to do with it since a friend of poor dear Jacobini's—he was a musician too, had a maggot in his brain, of course, like all the rest of them—imagined, I remember, he had discovered some extraordinary secret in acoustics, and was always writing to the Home Secretary, and President of the Board of Works, and a lot of other big-wigs, demanding they should empower him to reconstruct all the theatres and concert-halls in London on his infallible new system.—Well, he showed me the moon through a telescope. And it was horrible, utterly horrible! I could

not forget it. It gave me nightmare for a week afterwards. Come over here, Mary, and let me take hold of you, and assure myself you are good wholesome flesh and blood, not a stray beam of light reflected off the bosom of a planet, covered with hideous dead and dying volcanoes.'

Miss Crookenden came to the side of the bed and took her friend's outstretched hands.—'You are very poetical to-night, Sara,' she said.

'That is more than can be said of you, my dear. You are alarmingly matter of fact,' the elder woman answered, with one of her wide, genial smiles.

'Oh, I can be poetical too, if I try!—"I am a butterfly, born in a bower, christened in a teapot, died in half an hour"—that is to say, most probably married at the end of seven months, which comes to much the same thing, rightly understood. Marriage is a sort of grave, Sara, in which, it seems to me, women are called upon to bury a whole lot of precious and delightful possibilities.'

'Ah, my dear!' cried Madame Jacobini. She thought of her drive through the streaming streets of Bristol, in a hack cab, with the impecunious, irascible Jacobini beside her, upon her wedding-day. Had marriage then seemed as a grave to her, and not rather as an opening of doors into regions altogether lovely, romantic, supernal? Again she rebelled against the joyless attitude of mind of the rising generation.

'Yes, but it is,' persisted Mary. 'To begin with, marrying one man is equivalent to refusing all other men. And that in itself is an agitating consideration, for many men have merits.'

At the far end of the passage footsteps passed over the boarded floor, and the door of number twenty-two creaked a little as Lancelot Crookenden closed it behind him.

'What was that?'

'One of the servants going to bed, probably.—Miss Crookenden knelt down and kissed her friend.—'Sara,' she said, 'should you very much mind giving up the Lakes and Venice? I should be so glad to go home. I don't feel as if I dare dawdle about with nothing to do but ask myself will you, won't you, will you, won't you marry Mr. Aldham next spring? Lancelot accused me of being changeable to-day. Perhaps I am changeable. And I'm afraid I shall make up my mind fifty thousand times and alter it again before April if I haven't something definite to do. I want to go home and work.'

'Work?' Madame Jacobini inquired, a hint of irony in her tone.

'Yes—don't laugh at me. I mean to enter myself as a student at the Connop Trust School—you know, the De Tessier girls used to draw there—go there every day, give up society and smart frocks, and grind.'

'Dear me, this is quite a new idea!'

'No, it isn't,' the young lady asserted, eagerly. 'To-day has brought it all to a crisis—to-day has been a hundred years long. It has changed the face of nature. But the idea has been somewhere in the background of my mind for ever so long.'

Miss Crookenden's reply was slightly disingenuous. But she could not quite summon up courage to men-

tion her interview with Colthurst, and listen to the sarcasms which she foresaw would be levelled against the oblique-eyed Tartar in his new and prophetic capacity. Colthurst's advice, warning, foretellings were a matter she purposed keeping to herself. Lancelot was not likely to speak of them. He had a great power of silence, specially regarding what appeared to him as disagreeable subjects.

'Promise you won't interfere; promise you won't object, and lodge a protest with Uncle Kent, and stir up the family to intervene and prevent me,' she went on, quite excitedly.

'I can promise nothing to-night. You have taken me by surprise—sprung a series of mines on me. I must think it over. And meanwhile, my dear, you really must go to bed.'

Mary clasped her hands with sudden violence. 'Oh, don't send me away, Sara!' she implored. 'Let me stay with you. I don't want to be alone. I'm frightened.'

Madame Jacobini put her arms round the girl, and drew the fair head on the down pillow beside her. It was not at all Miss Crookenden's habit to give way to nervous agitations of this description. Madame Jacobini silently coaxed and soothed her. She felt sure there was something behind—that she had by no means arrived at the bottom of the whole matter yet. 'Look here, dear child,' she said presently: 'if you feel you have compromised yourself and regret it, be brave, and break with Mr. Aldham at once. If you have the slightest fear that you care—well, if you

care for some one else more than you do for him, be honest, and tell him so to-morrow.'

'No, no,' she answered, wearily, 'it isn't that. Who is there to like better? Not poor Mr. Carr, who is old enough to be my grandfather.'

'That is hardly kind,' put in Madame Jacobini.

'Nor that idiotic Sir Theophilus O'Grady. Nor Ludovic Quayle. I like him; he entertains me. But he doesn't really care two straws about me. I happened to be watching him once when Lady Calmady—you remember she married that extraordinary man down in Hampshire whom Lancelot's so devoted to, and who keeps race-horses—I watched him once at Mr. Carr's when she came in unexpectedly. I don't mean any harm. It was rather beautiful, in a way, you know. He must have cared for her very much once upon a time, and—well, that seemed to settle the question.'

'And how about Lancelot himself?' Madame Jacobini asked cautiously.

Miss Crookenden rose from her knees.—'Lance is a darling!' she said.

'Ah!' murmured the elder woman.

'But I have no more intention of marrying him—if I am to speak plainly—than I have of marrying the man in your enemy the moon, Sara. Aunt Caroline would fight to the last drop of her blood to prevent it. She is furious at his having come to see us now. She looks to Lancelot to float the name of Crookenden into the aristocratic haven where she would have it to be. Oh, and then it would not do in lots of ways! Lance would not give me room enough. He would

cramp me. It is even conceivable I might get a little tired of him. He is a darling,' she repeated, with conviction, 'but he is also a wee bit of a bore. He has no imagination. He is quite too solid.'

She kissed Madame Jacobini lightly once more.

'I have been dreadfully selfish, staying talking so long. Now I will go to bed. Oh, yes, I am quite sensible again—afraid of nothing. I only hope to goodness that Swiss woman has done snoring.'

BOOK IV.—THE DRAG ON THE WHEEL.

'Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall.'—*Measure for Measure.*

CHAPTER I.

PERHAPS the saddest poverty of all is the poverty which maintains an air of superficial smartness. The poverty which, while gradually but surely sinking downwards, makes, as it sinks, convulsive and fruitless struggles against its fate. The poverty which has not lost desire in despair, but still clutches at cheap alleviations, fly-blown pleasures, hollow yet showy joys. The poverty which makes furtive attempts at elegance, and still has energy enough left to spread its poor draggled tail in the infrequent sunshine with a foolish hope of impressing the passer-by.

To study this description of poverty it is not necessary to go on pilgrimage to the East-end of London town, or even to cross the river—that sullen, dark-robed priest, who receives so many last confessions, and closes the eyes of so many sinners, broken in heart and fortune, with his cold wet fingers.

Close against the streets and squares which, judging by their aspect in the early summer months, go so far towards proving the truth of the old saying that 'London streets are paved with gold'—close against all this splendour, against these semi-celestial, flower-embosomed mansions, the poverty, of which I speak,

flits, and flaunts, and hides, and peeps, and mimics, and hopes, and tarries,—on pavements just a little narrower, in houses just a story or two lower—though still porticoed and stuccoed—in clothes only just a trifle less fashionable, but with a dimness and clinging odour about them indicative, in proportion to its intensity, of longer or shorter periods of incarceration in the back premises of the second-hand wardrobe-dealer.

This description of poverty is addicted to moving. It frequently changes its address. It lies abed late of a morning, and only regains a sense of security and freedom after dark. It is almost invariably in debt and in a persistent state of anxiety as to ways and means. It seldom enters a place of worship, though it contrives to show a gay face and smart garment in the music-hall or gallery of the theatre. It is generally vulgar, mean, tawdry, sensual, improvident, disreputable, incorrigible; often clever, witty, kindly, unselfish, as well. And it is always pathetic—pathetic with the desolating pathos of things mistaken and gone astray; of things by nature glad and pleasant, but through accident or wilful mis-use grown soiled and dirty; of things born with a curse of inadequacy and futility upon them—dancing, as vessels dance, all the more merrily over the waves for lack of the ballast, that, while it would make their course a slower and more laborious one, would save them from foundering at last.

And it exists in plenty, this poverty. In its earlier stages both the charitable societies and the elaborate parochial machinery of the day, which in many direc-

tions effect such excellent work, fail, broadly speaking, ever to touch it. And so it goes its sad, laughing, weary, frivolous, profitless, way down, down, down—to the hospital ward, or the workhouse yard, or the fetid cellar; or, at best, gets back, in humbleness and, too often, in dishonour as well, to the quiet village on the seashore or among the green country lanes, whence in an evil hour, years ago, it journeyed up to town. There to wait, not without petulant outburst of anger, or fretful melancholy, or irremediable regret, till Death comes, in his mercy, to dry its silly tears, and soothe its worn nerves, and ease its long disappointment, and lull it at length into a slumber which neither duns nor desire ever again shall break.

It was to a region of South-West London, which for obvious reasons it would be invidious further to particularize, largely patronized by this particular form of poverty, that James Colthurst made his way about a fortnight after his return from the continent. He had a visit to pay, which from various causes promised to be a painful one. He had put it off as long as possible. If you are unhappy enough to have a skeleton-inmate of your private cupboard, it is but natural that you should avoid opening the cupboard door oftener than is absolutely necessary. The cupboard door being shut, you can manage not only to look the world boldly in the face, but even to forget the ugly, grinning thing standing there within for quite long spaces of time. When the cupboard door is on the jar, or, still worse, wide open, it is a different matter altogether.

In respect of his profession Colthurst was, as we

know, a genuine enthusiast. It should always be borne in mind that his father had been a celebrated divine. The saying, 'Once a priest always a priest,' holds a deeper, more scientific truth, perhaps, than is generally recognised. No element in character is more persistent than the preaching element. It survives through generation after generation. The doctrine preached by the child may be surprisingly different to that preached by the father; yet some doctrine the child assuredly will preach,—so let those that love not discourses stand from under! In Colthurst's case the stream of didactic energy which in his father had issued in fiery religious zeal was diverted into quite another channel, viz., that of passionate belief in the function of art in the social and philosophic evolution of the immediate future. The sermons of an Evangelical popular preacher, and the pictures of an ardent admirer of work of Bastien-Lepage in painting and of Walt Whitman in literature, seem sufficiently far apart. Yet it is not too much to assert that precisely the same force of inward conviction and the same vigorous individuality which had enabled old Dr. Colthurst to sway the emotions of a crowded congregation, now elevating them to heavenly places, now depressing them with salutary terrors of regions infernal, gave to his son's pictures their strange vitality, and to the man himself his fierce necessity for the promulgation of a new artistic propaganda.

But to gain his end, to issue his propaganda with effect, Colthurst perceived clearly that the cupboard must be kept pretty tightly shut. There must be no unexpected inconvenient revelations of that fleshless

countenance. And it was with the intention of taking one more look at the grisly inmate and then double locking the door, and keeping it locked—for exactly how long he did not carefully predetermine, luck might be on his side, unlooked-for events might come to his rescue—Colthurst was well just now, rested in mind and body, and disposed, consequently, to be hopeful—that he had started upon his unpleasing mission to the aforesaid region of South-West London.

Holding a large bunch of chrysanthemums in one hand, walking more rapidly as he neared his destination—not from ardent desire to arrive but from very ardent desire to be free to depart again—Colthurst turned into a crescent of drab-coloured, two-storied houses, the lower windows of the majority of which exhibited cards announcing 'furnished apartments to let.' The wind blew sharp and easterly, a first instalment of winter; and all objects at more than a few yards distance had the flat, shadowless greyness upon them which is among the many results of wind from that most undelightful quarter. Looking along the crescent, the western sky was suffused by a dingy redness of sunset. A barrel-organ stood in the gutter, right against the kerb, about the centre of the curve of houses. While upon the dusty pavement, close by, a little girl was engaged in dancing a *pas seul* for the edification of a row of children seated, as in a stage-box, along the steps of one of the line of dreary porticoes.

As Colthurst drew near the group he slackened his pace. For the scene, in its suggestion of the seamy side of civilisation, in its sordid details, in its uncon-

scious irony, appealed strongly to his humour. The little girl postured, attitudinized, pirouted with almost painfully faithful mimicry of some *premiere danseuse* of *Opera Bouffe*. Though small in stature, she displayed remarkable activity and self-possession. When the doorstep-audience applauded some specially startling feat of gymnatics, she swept them an elaborate curtsey in her dirty short-skirted cotton frock; or blew a coquettish kiss to the Italian organ-grinder, who, entering sympathetically, after the manner of his nation, into the artistic merit of the situation, could not restrain an occasional 'Brava!' Straws and litter, thanks to the sharp easterly draught, danced with the little girl. Colthurst noted them. He noted, too, the pinched chilly looks of the children—distressing, little mortals, whose laughter had a harshness in it, as of men and women grown cynical from long and intimate experience of unlovelier aspects of life. One, a crippled boy, his head swathed in surgical bandages, leaned up against the pillar of the portico, clapping his red nerveless hands with impish delight, as the performer sprang high into the air and came down on the flags again,—her pale red hair flying upward from under her hat,—upon the very tips of her indifferently shod toes.

Colthurst was interested. Here was a telling subject, if faithfully rendered, for a picture of one side of London life. It is true that more than once already he had seen pictures of some such subject. But he preferred to wear his rue with a difference. Colthurst was no benevolent, middle-aged *pater-familias,* who regards childhood from the genial, sentimental,

Christmas-party point of view. Not as a touching example of the pleasures of little innocents, happy in beautiful childlike fashion, showing with all the purity and sweetness of newly-opening flowers amid this barren wilderness of brick and mortar—not thus did he think of treating the subject. In sheltered homes, or safe down in the country, children of the flower-like order might exist still, perhaps. But on the London or Paris pavement, distinctly not.—These young people could not be accused of 'trailing clouds of glory' after them, he felt very sure, as they had gathered on that doorstep. They were not moving in 'worlds unrealized,' but, to use the slang phrase of the hour, 'knew their way about' uncommonly well. And it was as a satirist—though not so much of the children themselves, poor early-wise, early-sad little creatures, as of the social order he held mainly responsible for their deplorable precocity—that he thought of transferring their knowing antics and double-edged laughter to one of his canvases.—'Call it Theodora of the Pavement, or A coming daughter of Herodias,' he said to himself.

He was about to cross the street so as not to interfere with the progress of the exhibition, when the little dancer, whose face, owing to the rapidity of her evolutions, he had as yet failed to see clearly, stood still for a moment, to take breath.—Colthurst paused, an exclamation on his lips. The child caught sight of him. She waved her hand to her audience with an inimitable air of patronage.

'You can go home, my dears,' she said. 'The performance's over for to-night.—Then she ran up to

Colthurst, all honest childish eagerness, her small, wizened face beaming, her eyes dancing with delight. —'Why, Jim,' she cried, 'we'd almost given up expecting you! It's ever so long since you've been to see us.'

Colthurst winced. He was acutely aware of the row of sharp eyes fixed on him from the door-step. Aware, too, of the insinuating bows and smiles of the organ-grinder, who, seeing the small dancer possessed such an aristocratic acquaintance, thought he might as well be paid for his services as orchestra. Colthurst flung him a sixpence, and, taking the child's outstretched hand, walked on quickly up the street.

'Who taught you to dance like that, Dot?' he asked.

'Oh! nobody didn't teach me. But Mrs. Prust—you remember, Mrs. Prust, Jim?'

'Perfectly,' Colthurst answered.

'Cap'n Prust's got a new flag-staff in the back yard,' the little girl remarked, parenthetically.

'Has he? Well, b-but about the dancing, D-dot?' said Colthurst.

'Oh! well, Mrs. Prust she took me to the theatre a little time back, because mother was mopy, and she said it was a sin for me to be moped too. And I saw the ladies dance. Oh! it was lovely. Did you ever see 'em dance, Jim?'

'Yes—no—sometimes.'

'When I grow up I mean to be one of 'em. Do you think I ever could be one of 'em, Jim?'

'All things are possible,' he said, rather bitterly.

'And when we come back,' continued Dot, 'Cap'n Prust says let's have a bit of something hot for sup-

per, and tell him all we'd seen. And after supper I danced in the kitchen to show him how they did it, because he'd got his gout, you see, and couldn't go. Mr. Snell was there—Mrs. Prust's cousin as lives over to Shepherd's Bush. He came and went along of us. He said he was blessed if I wasn't as good as any of 'em. He said I danced prime.'

'Did he?' Colthurst remarked.

The little girl had reeled off her share of the above conversation very glibly, in a clear voice of remarkably wide range of intonation. Her speech was strikingly mature, like her small person, her neat features, her tiny hands and feet. There was the same energy in it as in her movements—a singular finish, too, and alertness. And this notwithstanding the bloodless look of her wise little face, for her skin was dim and blanched as that of one who has been through a period of semi-starvation.

'When you want to dance again, then, dance to Captain P-prust and Mr. Snell of Shepherd's Bush, in the kitchen, p-please, Dot,' Colthurst said. 'D-don't dance out in the street. I don't approve of it, do you hear? Those children are not nice associates for you.'

'I don't 'sociate with those children,' she answered, promptly adopting the long word. 'I just let 'em look at me, Jim—that's about all.'

'And that is a great deal too much. Look here, Dot,' Colthurst went on, taking the silver paper off the bunch of chrysanthemums. 'You shall have these if you will promise me never to dance in the street again.'

The little girl gave a long-drawn 'Oh!' of admiration, looking at the flowers with hungry eyes. Colthurst had rung the door-bell of a house on the left hand of the crescent, and the two, the man and child, were standing together on the step.

'Come, now, p-promise me,' he repeated.

Dot stood on tip-toe, and buried her nose among the flowers, inhaling their pungent scent with a kind of rapture. Then she whirled herself round wildly.

'It ain't fair,' she said, 'because you can see I want 'em ever so badly. And if I promise I'm bound to keep. I say, Jim, why ever are you so particular?'

Colthurst's dark face flushed.—'Will you have the flowers, Dot? You can only have them on that condition.'

The child hesitated, jumping up and down—her agitation of mind finding vent in this agitation of body. 'Oh! dear, I do so want 'em,' she cried. 'Can't I pay you for 'em any other way? I like the dancing, too, and you see we've no music at home.'

Colthurst shook his head.

'Then I'll have 'em. I won't dance in the street any more. I promise.'—She seized the bouquet, and then held it daintily, as though ashamed of her passing violence towards the beautiful blossoms.—'I'll promise,' she repeated. 'But I think it's rather a shame of you, Jim, to teaze and make nasty old conditions.'

As she finished speaking the house-door was opened from within, disclosing a solid female form arrayed in black—the black of economy rather than of bereavement, as might be surmised from the style of the

wearer's cap. This was black, also, but broke forth into nodding green and scarlet chenille blossoms, planted in a bed of lace, about the ears. A cap of an order, alas! rapidly becoming extinct; which, thanks to a flat silk band, slightly disguised by figured net, passing tightly over the top of the head, and by the wealth of its aural decorations, imparted a fine effect of width to the lower portion of its owner's face, making it, indeed, not unsuggestive of the human countenance reflected in the bowl of a tablespoon.

'What, Mr. Colthurst!—Never,' cried the owner of the cap.

As he stepped into the narrow entry, redolent of a pentrating odour of gas and Irish stew mixed in about equal proportions, and confronted the speaker, Colthurst knew, metaphorically speaking, that the cupboard door was opening, opening too. It had been ajar ever since he had recognized his little friend Dot in the attitudininzing Theodora of the Pavement. Colthurst felt he must wait awhile and screw his courage up a peg or two higher before he came face to face with the dreadful thing that stood awaiting him, there within.

'How d'ye do, Mrs. P-prust,' he said, as lightly as he could. 'I'm sorry to hear from Dot that your husband has been seedy again.'

The countenance in the spoon was not an expressive one. It wore an habitual air of comfortable neutrality, as of a well-to-do cat blinking sleepily in the sun. But if nature had denied Mrs. Prust the grace of facial mobility, it had endowed her with strong feelings and considerable power of putting them into

words. It so happened that James Colthurst was in the excellent woman's black books. A brief struggle took place within her, during which she debated whether she should testify to that fact by chilling brevity of reply, or whether—the temptation was a heavy one, for Mrs. Prust was conscious of matrimonial trials of extreme severity—she should enter fully into the existing physical condition of Captain Prust. Moral principle gave way before the craving for sympathy common to woman. Let those who have nursed a gouty ex-ship-master, blessed with an unlimited capacity for nautical anecdote, cast the first stone!

'Seedy!' she exclaimed, scornfully. 'No, Mr. Colthurst, more than that, sir. Cap'n Prust has been bad. Very bad. Gout. And rising.'—Mrs. Prust laid her hand descriptively upon the middle of her own stout person, and an ominous emphasis upon the conjunction.—'And rising,' she repeated solemnly. 'No more power in the legs than an infant. And the irritability. And, at times, the language. And yet continues to take in well, Mr. Colthurst. A little picking at breakfast some mornings; but a full meal at dinner and supper much the same.'

'That must be an encouragement to you, Mrs. Prust,' Colthurst remarked. 'A good appetite is a good sign.'

'Cap'n Prust'll last his time, sir, no doubt,' she replied with dignity. 'It may be short or it may be long.—There, Dot, run along like a good little maid, and show her mammy the pretty flowers.—I could mention some,' she continued, lowering her voice,

blinking mysteriously at Colthurst, while she raised her fat hands in mingled protest and warning—'I could mention some whose time may very well be shorter than Cap'n Prust, judging by what they take in. Lord love you, why a sparrow 'ud starve upon it! And a kinder, more inoffensive creature, I will say, Mr. Colthurst, never came down over stairs. Keeps herself to herself. No throwing up about the past, whatever the past may be. No words. No complaints. But the tears, Mr. Colthurst, in secret. The tears and the pining. Poor young thing!'

She blinked her kind, little, grey-green eyes as though the sun shone very full in them, and shook her head until the chenille blossoms vibrated wildly.

'There is blame somewhere, Mr. Colthurst. I ask no questions. But the tears in secret, the tears and the pining. Oh! it 'ud break a heart of stone. I'm truly glad you have come back, for it's time it was all looked into . If this was to be my last word on earth' —a contingency which appeared, it must be allowed, highly improbable,—'I should say so, Mr. Colthurst. It's quite time it was all looked into, or there may be those who'll have something on their minds that won't lie there easy, or let them lie easy either.'

Mrs. Prust concluded with a strong note of indignation in her voice,—voice disclosing her West Country origin by its inclination to rise into a distinct shrillness at the end of a sentence.

Colthurst, meanwhile, who found listening to the above conversation about as pleasant as rubbing salt on a sore, had kept his eyes fixed on the yellow and white diamonds of the oil-cloth of the entry floor,

while he pushed his moustache restlessly up from his lip. Now he glanced at his companion—looking, so at least that lady informed her disabled mariner below stairs, some few minutes later, 'more like a bilious fiend than anything human. Old Scratch himself 'ud have been pleasant company compared to him.'

'You are a sensible woman at bottom, Mrs. P-prust,' he said, in his quick whispering way. 'You have a good lodger who gives you very little trouble and pays you regularly. Let me advise you not to make it impossible for her to remain with you.'

And then poor James Colthurst—the lion of the year's season; the painter for possession of whose pictures dealers struggled; the man of undeniable genius, the preacher of newer and nobler ideas; the zealot filled with burning enthusiasm for truth, as he saw it, and that beauty, terrible perhaps, but illuminating, which all truth must needs bring along with it—walked on up the narrow entry, with its hideous oil-cloth, its shiny walls hung with paper representing impossible blocks of a happily unknown description of marble, its rancid smell of gas and stew, opened the door of the room on the right and stood face to face at last with that which he shrunk from, deplored, dreaded, that which, as he feared, rendered his life rotten at the core, and clipped the wings of his fairest hopes and aspirations,—the skeleton of a dead love and a living sin.

Chapter II.

A square room, with double doors at the back disclosing a vista of narrow and not over tidy bed-chamber. Horse-hair covered chairs, the seats of them black and shiny. A sofa to match, with a Joseph's coat of many colours in the form of a wollen antimacassar thrown over either end of it in the hope of disguising the unrestful solidity of its two sausage-like bolsters. A marble-topped cheffonier, the doors of it a little unsteady as to their hinges. On the wall above, a picture of a church made of dried sea-weed, glazed and set in a broad frame composed of small shells. On the mantel-piece a pair of green glass candlesticks, with jingling drops to them; and centrally, in the place of honour, the model of a vessel in a glass case, fondly supposed to be Captain Prust's schooner, the *Salome* of Cardiff, as she appeared off the banks of Newfoundland after encountering what is technically known as 'a breeze,'—her masts, spars, and rigging thickly incrusted with ice, rendered in the model by a plentiful sprinkling of morsels of splintered glass. In one corner of the room a litter of portfolios and dirty canvasses piled on top of a long, narrow, wooden sea-chest, in company with two or three dilapidated bandboxes. In the middle of the room a square table, covered by a black-and-green cloth; a tray upon it and tea-things, remains of bread and butter, a pot of canned lobster, and a plate of flaccid water-cresses.—This was what Colthurst saw on entering the dining-room of Mr. Prust's lodging-house. This, as setting to two very dissimilar figures—a tall, finely-made

woman, still young, but worn, her beauty coarsened by hard living and sorrow, and a small, alert, changling-like child, whose hands were full of chrysanthemums, golden and russet and white.

As he came in the woman rose from her place at the table and stood before the grate, her head and its unruly masses of dark hair thrown back. She looked silently full at him out of wide-open grey eyes that had a dry light in them. Over her dress she wore a claret-coloured ulster; stylish—the word must be allowed to pass, since it covers the fact—in cut, but stained, frayed about the cuffs and hem, and adorned by steel buttons as extensive in size as they were defective in number. A handsome woman, but with a dinginess upon her, only too much in harmony with the dingy room, the dingy street, visible through the window, curving away to that dingy glow of sunset behind the contorted chimney-cowls and slated house-roofs in the west. The child was dingy, too. Even the flowers, so it seemed to Colthurst, as he closed the door behind him and stood on the near side of the table, even the flowers had lost their freshness and lustre since they had passed into the hands of their present possessor. A blight was upon this place, and everything in and about it, which filled him with a loathing and unreasoning physical disgust.

A merely conventional greeting either of words or of hand-shake was impossible between these two persons—an empty form for which neither had the heart; and any tenderer description of greeting had unhappily gone out of fashion between them. So an

awkward pause of silence ensued. Then the woman with a gracious movement of courtesy spoke.

'You've made the poor little maid very happy over her flowers, Jim,' she said, her expression melting into a sudden sweetness of appeal about the eyes and full-lipped mouth.

Colthurst had been living in something of a fool's paradise, seeing visions, dreaming dreams; cheating the actual by mental excursions into the just conceivably possible; indulging that riotous imagination of his in the keen Swiss air and daring Italian sunshine, while he walked over mountain-passes, or through the deep cool streets and glaring piazzas of southern cities, his eyes greedy alike of their beauty and grandeur, their grotesque figures, their sinister historical suggestions. And through all the shifting sights, merry or sad, of his foreign holiday, through all the varying emotions, the vivid fleeting impressions, the hot race of thought and perception that had gone on within him, one impression, one vision, had been constantly recurrent. It had come upon him when he was a trifle tired and pensive, under vast silent mountain sunrise or sunset; or during the droning, incense-stuffy service in some stately cathedral, where the air seemed thick with the mystery of the supernatural. It had come upon him equally when he was in full possession of himself, mind and body; when he was vigorous, excited, moved by quick, wide-reaching apprehensions of things.—The vision of Mary Crookenden listening, responsive, drinking in his words; awakening, so he flattered himself, to a fulness of life and intention wholly new to her, as she

stood in the shadow of the mulberry-tree in that sun-scorched hotel garden at St. Michel-les-Bains. He had broken down the wall of prejudice which had divided her from him. He had made her recognise him. He had established a relation with her. All this had been a matter of ten minutes at the outside. He had not seen her again—had hardly wished to see her indeed. Yet he was satisfied, for the time being at all events. For something intangible, yet actual, had, so he believed, passed between them, from him to her. That was all he wanted. He had paid off the old score, he had taken his revenge, taken it in a way at once occult and beneficent.

All this will probably appear to the reasonable and right-minded very elaborate nonsense. To James Colthurst it was not nonsense at all. It was delicious, it was inspiring. He played with the thought of it continually. He went back to it again and again, taking strange fantastic delight in the proud maidenly purity, in the reserved, almost cold loveliness of the woman whom, after a pretty sharp struggle, he had, momentarily in any case, conquered. For though Colthurst's feeling in the matter was abnormal, morbid even, it was quite free, I think, from that which is sensual or base. He did not in the least mistake the nature of his relation to Miss Crookenden. He knew well enough it was of the intellect, not of the affections. He hardly regretted that—as yet.

And now after all this enchanting careering around in Fool's Paradise, in regions mysterious and visionary; after this innocent, even, in a sense, elevating debauch of fancy, was he brought up short against a

blank wall of fact. Fact gave him a blow on the head as with a pole-axe, bidding him mind what had been, rather than what might be. He had known this visit would be a pretty severe trial; but it proved worse, ten times worse than he expected. It was indescribably jarring to his imagination. This dingy, unlovely room, the tinned lobster and flaccid water-cresses, even the not ungracefully tendered thanks for his gift of flowers, sickened him. And it was only by a very strong effort of will that he controlled himself sufficiently to answer reasonably.

'Dot got her nosegay at the price of a promise,' he said, stammering more than usual. 'I am sorry to say she was not keeping very creditable company when I met her just now. You ought to send her to school or keep her more indoors, Jenny. Dot is getting too old to run wild in the streets in that sort of way.'

'Do you hear that, Dot?' Jenny Parris asked, her face hardening again.

'I hear,' the child answered, shaking herself impatiently. 'We've been all through it once already.'

Jenny leant her shoulders back against the mantelpiece, pushing her hands down into the pockets of her claret-coloured ulster, and looked at Colthurst with a dry, half-contemptuous smile.

'I've got a nice, dutiful little daughter, likely to be a comfort to me in my lonely old age, haven't I, Jim?' she said.

At that moment, it must be conceded, Jenny Parris did not precisely embody Mrs. Prust's description of her, as the kindest, least offensive creature that ever came down over stairs. Her bearing, and the tones

of her voice, were by no means calculated to appease James Colthurst. If she had been gentle and winning with him—she could be so at times—he would have done his best to spare her, to shut the cupboard door—the old metaphor may serve once more—as softly as possible, and double-lock it without any unpleasant grating of the key. You see Colthurst was in the disagreeable position of seeing a noble life before him, to which all the higher instincts of his nature drew him with strong attraction, while a moral obligation to this woman held him back. Should he repudiate that obligation once and for all; and, looking to the greater right, which certain philosophers tell us justifies the lesser wrong, sacrifice the individual to the demands of his own self-development, which, in a sense, was sacrificing it to the good of the race? To gain a great end, should he perpetrate a trifle of immediate cruelty?

With a sudden acuteness he perceived a way of escape. Jenny should decide his line of action by her own. If she was reasonable, he would be reasonable too, gentle and merciful even; though it would, in his present frame of mind, cost him a good deal to be so. If she was unmanageable, well, then, her blood must be on her own head, she would have brought her condemnation upon herself, and his conscience would be free of offence.

All this passed through his mind in the few seconds during which he stood opposite to her, at the near side of the table. Her defiant, taunting attitude calmed him, because it went to justify the line of conduct which he knew it would be easiest for him to pursue.

So he made her no answer, but pulled out one of the shiny horse-hair chairs from its place against the wall, called Dot to him, sat down putting his arm round her, while he helped to rearrange her drooping chrysanthemums.

Jenny watched him, watched his bent head, the quick deft movements of his hands, his glances and by-play with the little girl, rapid changes of expression crossing her mobile countenance. His indifference galled her shrewdly. At last she could endure it no longer.

'Jim,' she said, 'can't you spare a trifle of notice from the child for me? It's a long time since I've seen you. One might have thought you'd have a little something to ask or tell me.'—Her speech was interrupted by a hard, dragging cough.—'Did you have a good time while you were away?' she asked, when she recovered her breath again.

'A very good time,' he answered, concisely, without raising his eyes from Dot's bouquet.

'Did you see anybody you knew?'

'Yes.'

'Men or women?' Jenny demanded.

Colthurst looked at her, and not quite pleasantly. 'B-both,' he said.

There was a silence of some minutes. Then she broke out impetuously:—'Look here, Jim, it's no use beating about the bush like this. I want to know what's to happen to us all. That's what you've come to tell, I suppose. Let the child go—run along down to Mrs. Prust for half-an-hour, Dot, there's a good maid.'

She glanced at Colthurst significantly as she spoke, and nodded her head towards the door. But unfortunately Dot was a young lady whom it was not easy to dispose of in this unceremonious fashion. She wriggled herself up on to Colthurst's knee, nestled her small person back against his broad chest, and from that coin of vantage stared at her mother in naughty, daring challenge.

'I ain't a-going bothering downstairs to Mrs. Prust,' she said; 'Jim's very fond of me, ain't you, Jim? Mr. Snell says gentlemen gives flowers to the ladies they thinks most of. Jim didn't bring any flowers for you, he brought 'em for me. That shows he'd like to have me stay.'

'For God's sake don't take the child's part and set her up against me. She's a wicked enough little thing as it is.'—The woman spoke low and hurriedly. There was a ring of real misery in her voice.

Colthurst was touched somehow in the midst of his bitterness and disgust. He put his hand under the little girl's chin, turned her pale, wizened face towards him and kissed it; whereat she flung her arms about his neck and hugged him with extravagant manifestations of delight. Then he stood her down on the ground, though she struggled and protested, trying passionately to keep her place on his lap.

'Go downstairs, Dot,' he said, hoarsely.

'Do you mean that?' she asked. Colthurst bowed his head.

For a few seconds she waited gazing at him; the two strong wills, the man's and the child's, in opposition. Suddenly Dot turned, swept the flowers hig-

gledy-piggledy into the lap of her soiled pinafore, gave her mother a vicious look in passing, and ran out of the room.

Colthurst got up and shut the door after her, with a certain deliberation. Then he went over and stood in the window, keeping his back to the light. The child's presence had acted as a restraint; now that it was removed he knew the bad quarter of an hour had really come. Colthurst gathered himself together and waited. He wanted to avoid making the first move.

Jenny leaned her elbow on the mantel-piece and buried the fingers of her left hand among the masses of her rough hair. The dull glow of the western sky lit up her handsome worn face and her claret-coloured ulster. She hesitated a little; but she was too anxious for much diplomacy. She went straight to the heart of the matter.—'When are you coming back here to live, Jim?' she asked.

The uncompromising directness of the question staggered Colthurst. He temporized.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I have a quantity of work in view—some orders for portraits, thanks to Carr, besides two or three good subjects for pictures that I want to get into shape as soon as possible. I couldn't work at them here. It's impossible. The accommodation isn't sufficient.'

'You could take the drawing-room floor. It's empty. And you're a rich man, now; you could afford it.'—Again Jenny's voice had a taunting ring in it.

'Mrs. Prust's drawing-room floor is a most desira-

ble apartment, no doubt,' Colthurst replied. 'But it is not precisely adapted for my purpose. I must have plenty of space.'

'I dare say Mrs. Prust 'ud let the bed be moved out of the back room,' remarked Jenny Parris.

The line running across Colthurst's forehead grew deep. He was nearing the point of exasperation. Clearly it was impossible to argue the matter on these lines without losing his temper fatally. He intended if possible not to lose his temper. He was silent for a little. When he spoke again it was in a tone of statement rather than of argument; for he saw that he must definitely take the upper hand of poor inconvenient rebellious Jenny Parris.

'I have further plans,' he said. 'I have a notion of founding a school and getting students to work under me, as they do in some of the French studios. What is the use of having ideas if you don't share them, don't impress them upon other minds? That's the horrible part of a great personal talent,' he went on, softening, forgetting himself and the exigencies of the situation in the satisfaction of self-expression—'it dies with you. Unless you have made disciples in whom your spirit, your principles, your methods are incarnate, you leave only the corpse of your work behind you; leave it for pedants to finger and fumble over and pull to pieces, to misconstrue as only your thorough-paced pedant, with his semi-paralytic, penny-farthing intelligence, can misconstrue and misconceive the thing he gives half a lifetime to elucidate and illuminate. Do you suppose I can be content to flare away for ten years or so, as a kind of comet, with

no recognized legitimate place in this cloudy, old, English artistic heaven; and then be consigned to the limbo of æsthetic experiments, æsthetic curiosities? Good Lord, no. I want to leave the living soul, not the corpse of my work behind me; a soul that will grow and develop, and be every bit as alive a century hence in my followers as it is to-day in me.—There's a grand opening for me, Jenny, if I am free to make use of it. I must go on with one picture after another till I get the public thoroughly accustomed to my style, my form of thought, my outlook on life. Yes, I mean to go the whole hog. I do propose to myself to effect nothing less than a revolution. And to do that, I must get hold of the younger men, make them believe in me, still more believe in that which I believe—stand by me, back me up, carry on my work. I will give them the ideas; they, by developing those ideas, will give me a sort of immortality.'

And the woman listened. Did more, melted with sympathy and enthusiasm, though she did not understand a tithe of what he said. For she had loved him. Poor soul, did love him still. Loved the whole personality and individuality of him, even to his oddities and eccentricities, the less as well as the more admirable effects of him—loved his rapid stuttering speech, his quick restless movements, his vehemence, his violence and precipitation; loved the restless action of his well-made hands; loved even to see him, as excitement gained him, wrench at his shirt-collar or push his moustache up away from his lip.

For affection such as Jenny's has passed the limits of a refined and discriminating taste. It has little to

do with the intellect, with appeals to the intelligence, or even to the sense of beauty. It lies away back in the essences and origins of things, deeper than our meagre forms of speech. It has, inded, no need of words to express itself. Words are only baffling and impeding to it; for it is too profound, too intimate, too single and uncomplicated to be articulate. It has small brains, perhaps; it certainly, on the other hand, has a large heart. It does not weigh, does not consider, does not think; but feels only—spontaneous, uncompromising, immediate. It is among the most beautiful, the most unmanageable, the most dangerous things the world has to show.

And so, erect, her eyes liquid, lustrous, all the dry light gone out of them, a glow on her worn face that had nothing to do with the dingy sunset without, but with a sunrise of returning admiration and assurance within, Jenny stood listening. For this woman was generous, quick to hope, to forget and forgive. And in her faulty, impulsive nature, there was, even yet, a great longing after things pure, lovely, and of good report. Now it seemed to her that Colthurst unfolded before her a magnificent, if somewhat cloudy conception. Her whole spirit rose in enthusiastic response to meet it, dimly comprehensive though it was.

'Now is my chance,' Colthurst went on, in his hot urgent way. 'And it is a glorious one, a wonderful epoch-making one—if I am big enough to lay hold of it. The bulk of English art is like the valley of dry bones, dead, desiccated, profitless, useless—the refuse of what has been and is not; no genius, no intention, no purpose, no warmth and moisture left in it.

Well, I have got to make those dry bones live. To turn them from a miserable, imbecile mockery of past beauty and greatness into a living present beauty and greatness. I have got to breathe the breath of a great resurrection into them, to make those dry bones come together, to clothe them with flesh, to make them rise up and stand on their feet—a great army, strong with modern thought, with the modern gospel of science, of democracy, of sacred, uncompromising fact. I have got to put my fingers through all the æsthetic, artificial rot and rubbish of the day, and the effete, emasculated classicism alike. What do we want with reconstructions of the age of Zeus and Aphrodite? Or of the age of Nero and Domitian? Or of the age of Arthur and Charlemagne? Or of the miserable, pedantic artificialities of the reign of Queen Anne? They are all dead and gone, exploded, past, done with. We have moved on, thank heaven. Why call up their futile ghosts? What we want is an art up to date—the drama of love and hate, joy and torment, degradation and splendour of the men and women of to-day. To show the poetry and romance and glamour of the mind, and heart, and push, and noise, and vigorous living of to-day; that's what has got to be done. And, by God,' cried Colthurst, passionately, 'by God, I'll do it.'

And Jenny Parris stood listening, her lips parted, drinking in his words; drinking the intensity and daring of him as a thirsty land drinks in the beating autumn rain. She shook back her hair with a glad toss of her head, and answered him:—'And you will do it, Jim. You're big enough, no fear. You're

strong enough and clever enough. If you give your mind to it you'm bound to win. I'd like to see the man that would try to stop you. And, look here, Jim, how can I help?'

Colthurst had been very far from talking for effect. Even in his most exaggerated moments, he was, I am happy to say, guiltless of that. The thoughts and phrases had welled up, when he was once started, with little enough direction and diplomacy on his part. Nevertheless, in speaking he had undoubtedly supposed that every sentence would have shown Jenny, more and more plainly, the distance that separated him from her, his future from hers. And so her question fell on him like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. He was alarmed, terrified almost, at the unquenchable loyalty which made her thus claim her place again at his side. How could she help? Only in one way; and to point out that way was brutal in face of that same loyalty. Colthurst paused, amazed, in a sense confounded; filled with a sudden dreadful fear that he should find it impossible to shut the cupboard-door and hide the grinning skeleton after all.

Jenny mistook the cause of his embarrassment.

'Oh, I know,' she said, bridling in proud apology, 'I'm not the woman I was. We've been through pretty rough times together, you see, Jim, and they've left a bit of a mark on me. I've lost flesh ever since I've had that plaguing old cough of nights. My arms are poor,' she added, stripping up the sleeve of her ulster and of the dress beneath it, and contemplating the arm—white and muscular, but as sadly angular at

wrist and elbow—with a pathetically reproachful expression.

Then she glanced at Colthurst, a fine candour, an absence of all bitterness in her face as she continued:—

'But you know, Jim, I haven't been very happy lately. There's been nobody to please and keep going for. Dot's the most perverse little mortal that ever stepped this earth. She's just delighted to plague me; and if I say a word she turns round as impudent as you like, and laughs. There's no being upsides with her. And you seemed to have changed, Jim, and taken to fine folks and fine ways I knew nothing about. I'm afraid I've had nasty grudging thoughts about you—wished you'd never painted the "Road to Ruin" and the "Evening of Labour," and made yourself a great man. I fancied I liked the old starvation wages best, but if I see you haven't really changed, Jim,' she added very sweetly, in her incurable hopefulness—'if we can have the dear old times back, and a little more comfort into the bargain, a little more to wear and to eat and drink, why, I shall soon lose my cough and get my looks back—I'm only nine-and-twenty, after all.'

Jenny's voice was slightly unsteady. There were tears in it, though she smiled.

'You d-don't understand,' stammered Colthurst, in terrible perplexity. Revolt, rebellion, defiance, would have been easier to deal with than this.

'Why, why, surely,' she went on, gently, 'I ain't so changed as all that? And you'd have no trouble to get younger models for heads and hands and so

on, now you can afford to pay them. They'd be glad enough to be taken up by a man with a name like you. As to feet, well, upon my word, there's no model in London, not even Annie Sutton, or that little Italian Giacomelli girl Walter Creighton's always painting, can beat me for feet.'

Colthurst was silent. Her voice became very unsteady again.

'I should do as well as the lay figure, any way for the clothes and drapery,' she said. 'You know how I can stand, Jim, by the hour together—and things look so woodeny on the figure—I should do for that.

Colthurst stood biting his moustache. 'Let us sit d-down and talk it all out quietly, Jenny,' he said at last. 'I b-began at the wrong end of my story, I'm afraid, and misled you. You don't understand. I want to explain the practical, common-sense part of it to you.'

Jenny scrutinized him searchingly for a moment. Then she flung herself down in the leather-covered arm-chair by the fire-place. The sunset light had faded from the sky, and in the grey uncertainty of the dusk, the room looked meaner and uglier, and the woman, checked in the midst of her generous fresh enthusiasm, looked gaunt and old.

'Go on, Jim, then,' she said, curtly. 'Explain.'

But it was just all Colthurst could do, under the circumstances, to explain.

'I have taken a studio down in Kensington,' he said. 'It is large. It has two fire-places in it, so that if I carry out my plan of getting a few students to work under me, I could put up a partition for a time,

and shut off a portion of it for myself, till I could afford to build. They could work in the larger half of it, and—'

'You mean to live down there,' interrupted Jenny Parris.

Colthurst heard his own heart beat in the pause before he answered.—'Yes,' he said. And the word seemed to him to drop like a stone into a black, deep well.

Jenny sat very still for a few seconds.

'I shall be sorry,' she said, slowly, looking steadily at him, 'to leave Mrs. Prust. She's a good, kind creature, and the old gentleman's wonderfully fond of Dot.'

'I d'didn't propose that you should leave Mrs. Prust at present.' Colthurst turned and glanced out of the window, along the curve of the dreary street. 'There would be hardly proper accommodation for you and Dot. There are only three rooms, besides the offices, attached to the studio.'

'I've lived in two rooms for a good number of years now,' she replied, quietly, 'excepting when I've lived in one. You needn't be so tremendously considerate of my comfort, Jim. I'm not too particular. I could manage—for a time—till you can afford to build—as you say—till then, you know.'

Then Colthurst grew a little mad. It is such situations as this which push even good-hearted and conscientious men into cruelty, into crime even. But one idea, that of self-preservation—which meant the preservation of his genius unshackled, of the possibility of carrying out his convictions and great pur-

poses unhindered—was upon him. He came across from the window and stood in front of her.

'Is it conceivable,' he asked, 'that you don't recognize that you and the child being there would simply ruin me? It could not be kept dark. Every one must see, every one must know it. Just the people I most want to get hold of would resent it most hotly; would consider it an unpardonable scandal and outrage. Are you to open the door for my sitters? Am I to risk their running over Dot ballet-dancing to a barrel-organ on the doorstep? Don't you see that it's out of the question, unpermissible, absurd?'

Jenny Parris rose to her feet. She was trembling so violently that she had to catch hold of the corner of the chimney-piece for support.—'My God! after all these years, you're not going to cast us off, Jim?' she cried.

'Cast you off—what have I ever said about casting you off? Of course not. You shall have your allowance, and I'll settle just as usual with Mrs. P-prust. And, when I can, I'll come, as I have to-day, and see you.'

Jenny put up both hands and thrust back her hair.

'Oh! it's not the money, it's not the vile, wretched money I want,' she cried, passionately. 'Do you think thirty-shillings a week and the lodgings'll pay me for my happiness and my health and my good name? There's only one way to pay me for mun, Jim, and you know that. And you've promised me, scores and scores of times over. Make an honest woman of me, Jim, and save the child from shame, and give her a chance. She's your own flesh and blood, Jim. And

somebody's told her, or she guesses. She's as sharp as a needle. Oh! she's a wicked little thing! You heard the way she threw off at me about those flowers.'

Jenny came closer to him, her face working with strong emotion, all blanched, distorted, ghastly, in the chill evening dimness. She laid her hand imploringly on his arm.—'As you'll have to answer for your deeds one day before God Almighty—'

Colthurst instinctively tried to shake himself free—to draw back.

'Yes,' she repeated, wildly, 'as you'll have to answer then—now, before it's too late—before success and money and fine company have turned your head—before you've lost all your liking for me—before—before you've lost your heart, Jim, to some of those grand ladies that pet you, and flatter you, and crack you up—marry me, Jim—marry me—there isn't a woman among them all 'ud ever be the wife to you I'd be.'

Jenny put both hands on his shoulders.

'Why, Jim, Jim!' she cried, with heartbreaking earnestness, 'don't you understand you're just everything in the wide world to me? I love you, man—'

She paused, her speech broken by a gasping sob.

'I love you now as I loved you when we loitered in the combes above dear old Beera, in the evenings, years ago; and heard the gulls laugh and the pheasants call, and the breeze slip up through the tops of the oak wood, and the beat of the surf on the bar across the bay, and the cry of the men and the rattle of the cable, when the skiffs came in and took up their moor-

ings back of the pier, waiting for the tide to bring 'em in to quay.'—Jenny let her hands drop at her sides, and tossed her head back with a sudden, sobbing laughter.—'You know what's happened since. Luck's been against us, and times bad. But I love you, Jim,' she said, 'I love you; that's all. There's nothing more to say.'

But, alas! from Colthurst's point of view there was much, everything more to say. On the one hand was this woman's affection for him and his obligation to her—an obligation which he knew he was discharging at least as fully as most men discharge such obligations. On the other hand was his career, his mission, his unsatisfied rage of living, and the haunting aching sweetness of a pure and ideal love. Must he sacrifice all these to poor Jenny Parris?

And it must be remembered that Colthurst knew the worst as well as the best of her. Knew her loyalty, her outbursts of unselfish devotion; but knew equally her hot temper, her jealousy, her radical incapacity for the strain of a well-ordered manner of daily living, knew the element of coarseness in her nature, knew her light-mindedness and vanity, knew her want of tact, knew her recklessness when in good spirits and her general unmanageableness when in bad. Knew that this impulsive, half-educated woman could never become a real companion and help-meet to him, could never take her place in the social circles in which he intended to move; knew that she was incapable of helping him forward, supporting him, climbing upward by his side. Earlier she might, perhaps, have done so, for there had been a singular

quickness and adaptability in her; but it had given way under the hard and demoralizing conditions of her position.

All this Colthurst knew. Let us be just to him. And it was not only this, for he had a more bitter complaint against poor Jenny than any of these—a complaint which he tried never to formulate, even in silence, it filled him with such loathing and disgust. He had hoped it might lie buried for ever out of sight and remembrance; but now, in his excitement and perplexity, now in his growing fear—fear that the woman would soften him, get her own way, and so keep him for ever enslaved—now, in his extremity, he turned and struck her with the hideous weapon with which she, unhappy yet—in a sense, for we must be just all round—heroic soul, had by her own action furnished him.

'Jenny,' he stammered, under his breath, 'I can't marry you. You remember that time, three years ago, in P-Paris. You know what I mean. That was too much. I can't marry you. You know why.'

Colthurst was pale, too. They were very terrible, those two white, human faces, close together, looking into each other's eyes in the dingy London dusk, a knowledge between them of something too pitiful, too vile to put into words.

If, in speaking, Colthurst had anticipated an outbreak of denunciation, he was mistaken. Jenny took a long, choking breath, closed her lips rigidly, drawing herself up to her full height. She was nearly as tall as Colthurst. Now, in the growing obscurity, she seemed to loom up before him, a grand, dark, tragic

figure, wrapped about by the solemnity of an unalleviable woe.

'You can go, Jim,' she said. 'We've had it all out now. I know what you mean. You know why I did it. I couldn't let you and the child starve.'

'Better have let us starve ten times over than keep us alive at the price of such shame,' he answerd.

'Would you have said so then?'—Jenny put the question with a queer mixture of avidity and mockery.

'Yes, you know I should,' Colthurst answered, very quietly, 'if you had given me the chance.'

There was a brief silence. The woman was the first to speak.

'You can go, Jim,' she repeated. 'We've had it all out now. You can make your mind easy. I shan't hang about the fine new studio down in Kensington, and put your sitters about, and ruin your prospects. Only remember this, Jim, if you should happen to take a fancy to one of those fine ladies—you said there were women among your new friends as well as men—and make up to her, and try to marry her, well, I warn you she'll see me first. She shall hear the whole story, and then if she likes to have you she may.'

Jenny moved slowly across the room as she spoke. Her knees gave under her, and she laid hold of the furniture in passing to steady herself. She sunk down on the hard black horsehair sofa.

'There, go,' she said, 'go, Jim, like a good fellow. I've had about enough.'

Some ten minutes later Mrs. Prust knocked at the door with a view to the removal of the tea-tray. This,

by rights, was numbered among the duties of Serena, the sharp-eyed, youthful general-servant of the establishment. And, for once, Serena had displayed alacrity, not to say ardour, in her readiness to step upstairs any time during the last hour and bring the tray down. But her mistress, with more than one cutting remark as to the hatefulness of poking, and prying, and curiosity generally in girls who took no more than six pounds a year wages, announced an intention of fetching it down herself. In truth the worthy woman was bursting with impatience to know the result of the 'bilious fiend's' visit, and to ascertain whether her lodger's satanic acquaintance had acted on her advice and 'looked thoroughly into it all.'

When Mrs. Prust bustled into the room, Jenny was still sitting, dry-eyed, on the hard sofa, in her stained, frayed, claret-coloured ulster, her hands lying idle in her lap.

'Why, my dear, good soul,' cried the landlady, her well-cushioned person coming into sudden and sharp collision with the corner of the table, 'whatever be thinking of sitting alone in the dark? You'm mazed, sure-ly?'

In intimate conversation Mrs. Prust laid aside fashionable conventionalities of diction, and relapsed into the idiom still prevalent in Devon.

Something in the familiar accent, in the comfortable, kindly, fussy presence, touched a very tender chord in poor Jenny Parris's battered heart.—'Oh, Mrs. Prust!' she said, 'let the tea-things bide and come here. Sit down by me a bit, and give me your hand. I'm in deep waters, the floods have gone over me.'

She stopped abruptly, interrupted by a fit of coughing, which shook her strong frame painfully.—Mrs. Prust, meanwhile, murmuring something profoundly incoherent concerning 'poor young things,' 'inoffensiveness,' 'Old Scratch,' and 'lozengers,' for one of which objects she, at the same time, instituted a vigorous but unsuccessful search in the pocket of her dress.

'It'll pass in a minute,' gasped Jenny. 'I get it like this, often by night.'—She paused for breath, and then continued slowly—'Sometimes I think my time won't be long here.'

'There, there, now,' said Mrs. Prust, soothingly, shocked at this confirmation of her own prognostications. 'My dear soul, don't be fretting about such things as that.'

'But I don't think it will,' Jenny repeated. 'When I feel like I do to-night, I should be more glad than sorry to know I should go soon. It's a cruel, bad world, Mrs. Prust. And see here, I won't deceive you. I've been no better than I should. I ain't what's called a respectable woman. I've gone pretty low. But don't turn me out, Mrs. Prust, there's a good, kind body. Help me a bit. Not with money,' she added, under a swift fear of misconception; 'I shall have enough, some way or other, of that. But help me with the child. She's fond of the Cap'n, and he's good to her. If I go, you'll remember her, won't you —she's got no friends but you—and not lose sight of my poor little maid?'

The landlady pressed her hand in silence, save for a gurgling and choking, very really, if inelegantly, indicative of sympathy. At last she quavered out—

'Don't you werry, my dear. While I'm above ground she'll want for nothing. And I must say, even when most irritable, Cap'n Prust's as set as never was on little Dot.

Chapter III.

Early in December it happened that Professor Sylvester, the Royal Academician who presided over the Connop Trust School, fell ill. He caught a bad bronchitic cold; stayed at home, went to bed and got up again fully persuaded of the necessity of passing the remainder of the winter in Sicily, or at all events on the Riviera. Good Mr. Barwell, the under-master, meanwhile, was far from enjoying his hour of supreme command. Not that he grumbled at the increase of work it brought him; but that his modest soul was harassed by conscientious fears of the inadequacy of his own powers. He trembled lest the school should suffer. In moving terms he implored the School Council to come to the rescue, and rig up a mock sun of some description, until such time as the legitimate Royal Academic rays should again pour their cheering influences upon the sixty and odd students now under his sole tuition. But at such short notice even a mock sun was not easily procurable, every painter of standing being fully occupied with his own pictures for the spring exhibitions. Adolphus Carr, deputed thereto by his fellow council-men, proceeded from studio to studio in vain; and the last day of term drew in sight with Mr. Barwell, still revolving in unilluminated loneliness, wringing his hands.

It was at one of Mr. Carr's Wednesday afternoon parties that Colthurst first heard of the dilemma in which the Connop School found itself. Colthurst had a standing invitation to these parties, and during the last six weeks had availed himself pretty frequently of it. Not that his love of society had suffered any appreciable increase; but that at Mr. Carr's there was always a chance of meeting Miss Crookenden, and to meet Miss Crookenden again was a growing desire with him. An impression may be strong, but, almost in proportion to its strength, it craves for renewal, for the satisfaction of contact with that which produced it.

And to-day, it seemed, fortune was disposed to smile on Colthurst, and grant him the renewal he desired. For on entering the first of Mr. Carr's suite of handsome rooms—that gentleman occupied a very good flat in one of the large red mansions that have sprung up of late years along the western portion of the Embankment—one of the first persons he remarked was Madame Jacobini. She was ensconced on a sofa, just by a wide, elaborately-draped doorway. Her eyebrows were elevated, her plain, clever face full of expression—she had on a black bonnet with dash of yellow in it which suited her admirably—and her hands were busy in gesticulation as she conversed vivaciously with Mr. Clement Bartlett, whose playing of Captain Dulcimer, in 'A Quarter to Eight,' triumphantly justifies—so say his many friends—the high opinion they have always expressed regarding his dramatic talent. It is unsympathetic, it comes near being discourteous, to differ from your friends

in opinion. Mr. Bartlett was guilty of no such discourtesy. His own opinion confirmed that of his friends, confirmed it really generously. With the result that, just now, he presented to Colthurst the spectacle of a supremely self-complacent back.

Mr. Carr, meanwhile, standing at the entrance of his dim, crowded, carefully lighted, luxuriously-furnished apartment, immediately after greeting his newly-arrived guest, embarked in a recital of the woes of the Connop School. He was full of the subject, so full that for once in his life he overflowed—overflowed to the detriment of discretion, which got a lot of the starch washed out of its neat, self-respecting, little person in the process.

'It really is very much on my mind, Colthurst,' he said, with mild seriousness, in his most admirably confidential manner. 'I volunteered at the last Council meeting to do my best to secure a *locum tenens*. I have been very much interested in the school from the first, you know. I have the honour of being one of the trustees of the Connop Trust, and I have always been most anxious that the schools benefiting by the endowment should maintain a high standard, and offer a solidly good artistic education.'

'They are less r-rutted in prejudice than the Government schools—one can say that for them without hesitation,' Colthurst put in.

'Ah! I am glad you think so!'

Even Colthurst's complimentary speeches appeared to Mr. Carr suggestive of sudden and involuntary collision with some hard and very angular object. Colthurst in conversation affected his mind as driving over

a jolting road would have affected his body. Mr. Carr paused a moment, and drew one lady-like hand down over the back of his head to soothe his jarred nerves.

'I really have taken a very great deal of trouble in this matter of a *locum tenens*. I was perfectly ready to do so; but I must confess the result has been discouraging, almost annoying to me. It has been an unpleasant revelation to me of the lack of public spirit —I must say so—among the professional brotherhood, Colthurst. One man after another has refused. And it is most embarrassing, really anything but pleasant, to meet with a series of refusals. But this morning I thought my vexations were at an end—that I had secured Walter Creighton. I ought not to say that he actually bound himself by a promise; but his tone was most encouraging. I have just received this telegram from him.'—Mr. Carr held the square of pink paper by one corner, and tapped it reproachfully with his forefinger.—'He says, "Extremely sorry, but find it impossible on further consideration to undertake work."'

'I don't know that Creighton's teaching would have b-benefited your students very much. He is hopelessly hide-b-bound by the great classic superstition,' Colthurst said, while his eyes roved restlessly over the company assembled.

—There was Mrs. Frank Lorimer, all innocence, and in an irreproachable gown from Paris. There was Antony Hammond's neat, beardless face, increasingly rotund person, and air of studied yet invincibly easy good-humour. There was Miss Dampier, bright-eyed, high-coloured, in general effect like an aged gos-

samer, undulating with admiration in front of Cammada, the new tenor. How sincerely Colthurst did not like that expansive spinster! He hoped to goodness she might have no opportunity of undulating in front of him before the afternoon was over.—

'Ah! I think you are always inclined to be rather hard on Creighton,' Mr. Carr rejoined, suavely, remonstrant, and very sensible of another jolt. 'Like most ultra-Liberals, you know, you exhibit decided traces of illiberality in some directions, Colthurst. No one so autocratic as the Socialist—you must pardon my saying so—at heart. Now you cannot deny Creighton's drawing is fine—very fine. Of course, I grant you he is decorative, a little too much led away by his taste—and a most refined and exquisitive taste it is—for decoration.'

'He has never p-painted a picture in his life as far as I know, only fitted figures and accessories into many feet of canvas, as you might fit a pattern on so many yards of calico, taking care to fill up the corners nicely.'

Mr. Carr shifted his position slightly. His conversational spine really quite ached from the jolts. He sheered off from the apparently rather dangerous subject of Mr. Creighton, taking refuge in the superficially safer one of the masterless condition of the Connop School.

'It is a pity Mr. Barwell is so diffident. You know him? Excellent man, most amiable and painstaking. I have the highest respect for him; but his want of self-confidence amounts to a misfortune—a positive misfortune in the present case. For I believe, myself,

he is perfectly competent to carry on the school single-handed for a few weeks. You see, happily, there is no question of resignation on Sylvester's part. I have no doubt we shall have him back after Easter, possibly sooner. We merely require a stop-gap.'

Colthurst's eyes still roamed restlessly over the dimly bright rooms.—There were Mrs. Carmichael and her two handsome, well-groomed daughters. The younger one was laughing a little, trying hard not to laugh too much—though she has such pretty teeth—at something Mr. Evershed—he is a clerk in the Home Office—was telling her. There was Horatio Deland, the thought-reader, too, whose lank black hair and rather verdant complexion are so uncomfortably suggestive of a rough Channel crossing. He was talking to Miss Hattie White, the smart little American who plays the banjo.—

'I have applied to every one I think the least likely to help us,' Mr. Carr added. 'I really am at a loss to know what further steps to take. This telegram is very annoying—very.—Ah! Duckingfield, how d'ye do? Delighted to see you. I was just telling Colthurst about our difficulties at the Connop School. Walter Creighton——'

But the repetition of Mr. Carr's woes was lost upon Colthurst, for at last Miss Crookenden had come into sight. The young lady emerged from the dining-room and advanced slowly across the inner drawing-room. She had a tea-cup in her hands, and Colthurst judged it must be somewhat over-full from the careful way she carried it. The centre of the room happened to be vacant just then; he consequently had an

uninterrupted view of her. Her close-fitting blue-grey gown, bordered with beaver, was stiff in front from throat to hem with silver embroidery. Her shadowed fair hair was surmounted by a hat or bonnet —it would be presumptuous to specify which—blue and silver too, the distinct form of it not unlike that of a little winged helmet. Arrayed in this suit of fairy-like armour, Mary Crookenden appeared even more than usually seductive. Her moonlight beauty gained a certain dainty edge, a hint of delicate audacity from her costume. She was lovely, and there was a sort of challenge—refined, but very sufficiently provoking to the spectator—in her loveliness.

Beside her was a man whom Colthurst did not know, but whom he perceived to possess all the unconscious insolence which comes of very good breeding. He was tall and slight. His neck was rather too long, and his shoulders sloped rather too much. He must have been over forty. He had a remarkably beautiful mouth. Apparently he found favour in Miss Crookenden's sight, for she talked to him quite gaily as she came slowly down the length of the room. Apparently he found favour in Madame Jacobini's sight also, for she welcomed him with one of her widest and most genial smiles as he offered her cream-jug and sugar-basin to complete the joys of the cup of tea Miss Crookenden had brought her. Self-complacency meanwhile, became less aggressively evident in the general expression of Mr. Bartlett's person. His glory seemed to wane slightly under the almost pedantic courtesy of the other man's bearing

As Colthurst watched the little group his spirits did

not rise. He had his desire. There was Miss Crookenden sure enough—Miss Crookenden animated, gracious, gay, her graceful figure thrown into high relief by the massive russet draperies of the doorway behind her, her silvery breastplate as she moved giving off scintillations of white light. She had never looked more engaging, but never, alas! seemed more inaccessible, further away. For Colthurst recognised, more clearly than he had ever done before, how she was hedged about by wealth; by the pretty queenship of her acknowledged beauty; and by those unwritten laws of social privilege which in theory he so despised, but which in practice he had to admit are so tyrannically potent in the ordinary conduct of life. And then he asked himself savagely to which world he really belonged—which for him held the final and permanent issues in its grasp.—The world of Mary Crookenden, proud and brilliant as she looked in her suit of fairy-mail, unassailable in the bravery of her spotless maidenhood? Or the world of Jenny Parris—Jenny, worn and degraded—Jenny, in her soiled, stylish ulster, with its frayed cuffs and missing buttons—Jenny, pitiful, though in a way splendid, wreck of unruly passion and of sin? The question was a hard one, and Colthurst was over-worked and harassed. He answered it in a pessimistic spirit. He was penetrated by a sullen conviction that the final issues would be cruel—that they would prove evil, not good.

But that conviction—since, while life and reason are whole in us, we all, by inherent necessity, try to restore the balance and failing one mode of consola-

tion take refuge in some other with ingenious haste—that only threw Colthurst back upon the fixed idea of his great artistic propaganda. If in some directions the roads were blocked, if in some departments he was foredoomed to sorrow, then the success of his work, the promulgation of his artistic gospel became indeed of infinite moment to him. It was all he had left. More than ever he thirsted for the satisfaction of making it obtain and prevail. And then suddenly his recent conversation with Adolphus Carr presented itself to him in a new light. Here was an opportunity of preaching his gospel ready to hand.—His spirits rose. His decision was swift. If the Council would appoint him, he would take the place of the disabled professor of the Connop School himself. 'Barwell might be a little scared, but he wouldn't offer any opposition. And it would be delicious,' he said to himself, 'delicious to plant the standard of revolt right there, in the heart of the enemy's camp.'—He turned hastily, an alacrity in his manner, to broach the subject to Mr. Carr.

But that gentleman was busy greeting a fresh influx of guests. Colthurst had moved aside absently, in his desire to get as complete a view as might be of Mary Crookenden; and now he discovered he had landed himself in a corner, that he was hemmed in between the end of a grand piano and the rather excessive developments of a highly ornate fireplace, while a small army of well and ill-dressed backs intervened between him and his host.

The nearest of the said backs belonged to Antony Hammond; and Colthurst, I am afraid, was disposed

to be rather uncharitable towards that agreeably good-tempered minor poet, as towards all persons who ventured to regard life from a facile, light-hearted point of view. In his present humour, half-morbid, half-ardent, Hammond's attitude of permanent amusement was anything but sympathetic to him; and to avoid being compelled to address him, he moved still further into the semi-obscurity of the corner. But the corner was a small one. He could not help overhearing a good deal that was said.

And as usual, Hammond had plenty to say. He was particularly happy, for he had just encountered a friend of very long standing who was an extremely attractive woman to boot. Some circumstances, moreover, connected with her piqued Hammond's curiosity shrewdly; and the gratification of his curiosity was to Hammond, it must be owned, an inexhaustible source of entertainment. He was the least snubbable of men. He proposed to permit himself the indulgence of asking two or three questions.

'This is delightful!' he exclaimed; 'as delightful as it is amazing. What has procured us this honour? What has induced you to visit our sublunary sphere, Lady Calmady? But that I have this moment had the privilege of shaking your hand, and that I found it reassuringly substantial and resistant, I should be tempted to believe myself in the presence of one of those astral bodies Horatio Deland has been descanting on at such desolating length. Will no philanthropic soul catch that poor demented being and clap him into a lunatic asylum? He really is not fit to go about loose. He is more tedious than a debate on the

Irish Question, a missionary sermon, or a cold in one's head. But to return to this delightful surprise you have given us—from whence, my dear Lady Calmady, and for how long?'

However much Colthurst might be absorbed in personal matters, it was impossible to him to be ignorant of his surroundings. His brain was a sensitive plate which could not but receive and retain pretty vivid images of all presented to his eyes. Moreover the name Hammond used, arrested his attention. For he had heard—who indeed has not?—of the strangely romantic marriage made some years ago by the lady now bearing it. A marriage so strange in some of its aspects that a vast number of people have asserted that no one but a not very nice woman could ever have had the courage to make it at all. There was an element of weirdness in it such as appealed strongly to Colthurst's imagination. He glanced at Lady Calmady with a quickening of interest; and the impression he received was a distinctly uncommon one. For, to put it concisely, now, as when some twenty years ago Sir Richard Calmady first had the extreme good fortune to meet her, she suggested a singularly enchanting cross between a Greek nymph, a Scotch deerhound, and a very well-bred Eton boy.

'I came up from Brockhurst this morning,' she said, in answer to Hammond's question. 'I go down tomorrow by the four o'clock. I was forced to come up—at least my maid told me I was—to do some shopping. And as I was passing I thought I would just look in and see how you were all getting on.'

'Oh, we are all trotting down the inevitable way in

much the same order as of old,' he rejoined lightly; 'some trot faster than others, and that usually rather against their will, I fancy. Carr, perhaps, keeps as even and moderate a pace as any. But we all trot.'

Lady Calmady had seated herself sideways on the arm of an easy chair. Her attitude perhaps was slightly unconventional. She lolled; but she lolled as a long-limbed, delicately-made lad lolls, or as Daphne may have lolled by the reed-grown banks of Peneus in Thessaly, ere the god loved, and pursued, and for ever lost her amid the green leaves of the sweet-scented thickets of myrtle. As Hammond spoke she smiled, and her smile held a very noble revelation of character. Her upper lip shortened, her eyes narrowed a little and quickened into wonderful sweetness and tenderness of expression. The faithfulness, the pathos, the finely-tempered strength of this woman's nature manifested themselves with a radiant directness in her smile.

'Ah, that trotting!' she exclaimed; 'it's a nuisance, isn't it? Yes, we all trot, more's the pity. For my part I don't care to talk about it.'

Hammond whirled the string of his eye-glass round his finger. He was charmed.

'The situation remains unchanged then? You are not in the least bored yet then?' he permitted himself to say.

A shade of displeasure crossed Lady Calmady's face. But Hammond was an old friend; and then too his imperturbable good-temper obtained him pardon for many speeches that trod rather hard on the heels of impertinence. Lady Calmady's upper lip short-

ened, and the clear sky shone out again in her beautiful smile.

'Dick and I are as great fools as ever, thank God,' she said, quietly. 'And so I can't but be sorry for the trotting. When the present is full of content, as good as it well can be, the slowest pace seems a lot too fast.'

Hammond looked at her in silence for a moment. And his thoughts wandered away to a certain slim, upright maiden lady nearing middle age, who wears out level, uneventful days among learned books and small inglorious duties in a reposeful country rectory. Even the most mercurial of mortals have their moments of insight and consequent twinges of regret.

'Ah, you blissful married people ought to be put a stop to somehow,' he cried, almost impatiently. 'You make the rest of us feel so abominably dissatisfied at times. It really is very difficult to forgive you, for you produce in one the detestable suspicion that one may after all have missed the very heart of the whole matter.'

And Colthurst, leaning his elbow on the end of the grand piano, alone as you can only be alone somehow in a crowd, gazed out of his dark corner sadly enough. For Hammond's tone had a ring of sincerity in it which made Colthurst feel quite amiably towards him for once, and pardon him those cheerful, futile, gnat-like dancings up and down in the social sunbeams which generally struck him as so irritating.

'Poor little Dot!' he said to himself, suddenly, inconsequently. 'Poor little Dot!'—But his mood hardened again almost immediately. Ambition gained over sentiment.—'Art remains,' he went on. And his

mind turned longingly in the direction of those sixty and odd professorless students at the Connop Trust School.—'Even in one term I might do a good deal, might sow seed it would not be easy to root out.'

He drew himself up, again looking for Adolphus Carr. It would be best to speak to him at once, and then depart. What was the use of lounging here, exciting, provoking himself by the contemplation of Mary Crookenden, her splendours and successes?

Unfortunately, Mr. Carr was otherwise engaged, not to be had. Assiduous, confidential, he was occupied in conducting the steps of Lady Theodosia Pringle, and those of her amiable, anxious, squat-figured, elderly daughter in the direction of refreshments. These two ladies are a stable quantity at a certain section of London entertainments, and Colthurst knew them well by sight. No one pursues her social duties with more praiseworthy pertinacity than Lady Theodosia. But providence has seen fit, in its inscrutable wisdom, to deny her a large income. She therefore pursues them gallantly on foot; unless the weather is phenomenally atrocious, when she has been known reluctantly to bestow her alert and upright person in an omnibus. She, consequently, habitually arrives at her destination furnished with a healthy appetite and a pair of questionably clean boots. Colthurst recognised that he must resign himself. Lady Theodosia's repast would take time. And he did not care to follow his host into the dining-room. To do so would oblige him to pass close to Miss Crookenden, and to pass her would be to speak to her. He did not want to speak to her; he wanted, indeed, very hon-

estly to put her altogether out of his head. If Naboth's vineyard can never be yours, is it not a palpable folly to hang over the wall of it, and whet appetite by plucking here and there a stray grape? He determined to remain where he was until Carr should come back. Meanwhile, he fell to planning about the Connop School; even, in imagination, to haranguing its sixty and odd students.

Unluckily, just as he had warmed up pleasantly to that same haranguing, and was cannonading away in denunciation, sarcasm, high faith, full-bodied, resonant periods, a speech of Lady Calmady's very effectually claimed his attention. She was standing close to him, Hammond still beside her. Colthurst could not see her face now; but he could not, however much he might have wished it, very well avoid hearing what she said.

'Oh! that's Miss Crookenden, is it, talking to Mr. Quayle! That's interesting. I have heard a good deal about her one way and another. She is not quite what I had imagined her, though. But then the descriptions from which I constructed my idea of her, though highly complimentary, were, I own, slightly confused.'—Colthust felt Lady Calmady was smiling. She hesitated a moment, and then added:—'Look here, Mr. Hammond, you know her, and you hear all that's said. I don't ask out of mere gossipiness, I think I am justified in asking. Tell me, whom is she going to marry?'

Hammond had regained all his usual lightness of demeanour.

'Who indeed!' he exclaimed. 'There you open up

a fine field for speculation. The aspirants are as the sands of the sea for multitude, and the young lady, though most adorable, is also not a little capricious. Heaven forbid I should speak disrespectfully of so charming a person. Pray understand I report merely in obedience to your question. I assert nothing. But the wicked declare she is rather addicted to the pastime of taking scalps, which is our refined modern way of putting the old formula, breaking hearts.'

'Ah! I am sorry for that,' Lady Calmady said softly.

'Never having been guilty in that line yourself,' put in Hammond gaily. 'Well, the last victim who has undergone the small operation I have just alluded to is poor little Sir Theophilus O'Grady. You know him? Not an impressive figure, yet I really was stirred to compassion for him three days ago, when I found him at the club, biting his nails down to the quick with rage and wretchedness, because, after smiling encouragingly upon him through last season, our young lady had just flatly refused under any conceivable circumstances to share his patrimonial peat bog and chances of being shot by a loyal and devoted tenantry. As for the others, I myself, Lady Calmady, have trembled more than once on the edge of the abyss. Even our honoured host is declared by some to have had his hours of delirium in which he contemplated the immolation of a happy and honourable bachelorhood on the altar of matrimony. Mr. Quayle's attitude, I think, speaks for itself, I may spare myself the exertion of dilating on it.'

Hammond, here, permitted himself a pause and brief inspection of Lady Calmady's countenance. He had a theory that no woman, be her marriage ever so happy a one, quite relishes the spectacle of a former worshipper paying court to another and younger than herself; and that romantic passages took place long ago between his companion and the gentleman he had just mentioned is a matter of history. I am delighted to say Hammond's theory received no additional confirmation on the present occasion, though. He was almost provoked. Lady Calmady so very evidently, as he said to himself, 'did not turn a hair.'

'We are further disquieted by rumours of a good-looking young country clergyman with prospects. I observe his existence is invariably justified by immediate allusion to the prospects,' he continued. 'Then there is that estimable, young Samson, the first cousin'—

'Ah! we won't laugh at Lancelot Crookenden, please, Mr. Hammond,' Lady Calmady said quietly. 'At Brockhurst, we are all very fond of him. He is one of the very best of good fellows. Behind his silence and simplicity there is plenty of character. He rings true, absolutely true.'

Hammond whirled the silver string of his eyeglass round his finger.

'Fortunate youth to have secured such an advocate,' he exclaimed, piously. 'We can then be in no doubt now as to whom Miss Crookenden should marry. Yet so blind are even the most adorable young ladies, sometimes, to their own highest good, that I fear your original question as to whom she will

marry is nearly as far from being answered as ever, Lady Calmady—especially if she has, as the wicked assert, that little weakness for scalps. But she seems to be moving. Will you let me have the privilege of presenting her to you? Shall we come?'

Colthurst, penned in his corner, had found the above conversation anything but flattering to his self-esteem. He called Miss Crookenden by the hard name of coquette. He suffered a movement of—in his own opinion—very righteous anger against her. For in that half fanatical egotism of his, he accused her of having seduced him from the straight path of his own most sacred convictions. Had he not pledged himself to preaching the average, and was not Miss Crookenden about as far from an embodiment of the average as need be? She belonged to that small minority to whom this world offers a playground, not a workshop. She was—I quote his rather extravagant form of statement—a mere foam bell on the crest of the wave of artificial civilization. She was a decorative adjunct, nothing more. The underlying Jacobinism in Colthurst took fire. He greatly questioned whether a merely decorative human being is not worse than a superfluity, namely an iniquity; whether a creature at once so expensive—you had only to glance at Miss Crookenden to assure yourself that she represented an uncommon amount of expense—and so useless, ought to be permitted to exist at all. It required no effort of the intelligence to see she was lovely and be moved by her loveliness. Had he not just heard the extensive list of her admirers? They were not, to his thinking, persons endowed with

any astonishing degree of mental capacity. Colthurst began to rate himself for having behaved both faithlessly by his creed and unworthily by his intelligence, in having yielded so readily to her charm, in having so persistently entertained the thought of her.—But there was his host back again at last, having succeeded in appeasing the pangs of Lady Theodosia's hunger. Colthurst emerged from the obscurity of his corner.

'L-look here, Carr,' he said, stammering a good deal in his eagerness. 'I have been thinking over that difficulty of yours about the Connop School. I am willing to undertake it myself. You may t-tell the Council so. If you choose to offer me the post, I will accept it. And supposing any d-difficulty arises as to terms, as to the payment of a substitute, I am prepared to give my services. I don't think Sylvester's illness ought to be a tax on the school. If he claims the whole of his salary, I will waive the question of remuneration.'

Alas! poor Adolphus, what unlooked-for pitfalls beset the path of even the most diplomatic of men! For Mr. Carr had recounted his woes in all innocence, never dreaming that the recital of them would provoke this rejoinder. It had not occurred to him to think of Colthurst as a possible candidate. He had taken for granted he was far too busy to be able to afford to offer himself as a stopgap. Consequently the proposal took him wholly by surprise. Moreover, as Colthurst stood before him, dominant, urgent, his eyes with an odd, restless light in them, his face with a strange ravaged look on it, even Mr. Carr's polite indirectness gave way. He made a mental reflection

and that a distinct one. There was a lurid sort of splendour of intensity about the man, yet surely this was a very singular shepherd to invest with supreme authority over that flock of sixty and odd students, male and female, at the Connop Trust School!

'Ah! you are too generous, really too generous, my dear Colthurst,' he said, veiling embarrassment under an excellently civil show of enthusiasm. 'Your offer is positively princely.—Good-bye, Deland. I hope the *séance* will go well on Friday, and all sceptics be converted. So good of you with all your engagements to make time to come.—Yes, as I was saying, Colthurst, it is positively princely. At the same time you must not be public-spirited to the point of forgetting your own interests, you know. In mentioning our difficulties I was very far from intending to trade on your generosity to this extent.'

Which was perfectly true. Mr. Carr passed one lady-like hand down over the back of his neatly-curled head. To make use of a vulgar expression, he found himself very much up a tree.

'You must not come to a decision in a hurry, you know.—Ah! Miss White, going? Well, I am sure we are all deeply in your debt for the pleasure you have given us this afternoon. Some of those plantation songs are gems, perfect little gems,—Yes, you must consider your own interests, my dear Colthurst. The school-work would necessarily make heavy inroads upon your time. And with those two pictures on hand—most promising powerful pictures they are in my opinion; I have great hopes of them if you will allow me to say so—and with that portrait of Duck-

ingfield too, you really must think twice before encumbering yourself with the Connop School.'

'I have thought twice,' Colthurst answered. 'I have been through all the pros and cons. The pros have it. It just amounts to this, Carr, I want immensely to have the school.'

Oh! the joltiness of this conversational road. Our discreet, accomplished, elderly Cupid felt sadly shaken.

'I am sure the Council have reason to be greatly obliged to you for your handsome offer,' he remarked a trifle vaguely.

'You will let them know at once?'

'We have a Council meeting to-morrow afternoon at which I lay the results of my mission before them.' —Mr. Carr passed his hand down over the back of his head again thoughtfully.—'And I can only repeat that you are most generous, Colthurst; but if by chance you should happen to see the matter in a different light to-morrow, don't scruple to telegraph.—Ah! Madame Jacobini, you going too? Must you really? I am sorry. Caminada has just most kindly consented to sing. I wanted you to hear him, and I know he is very anxious for your verdict himself—'

'Mr. Colthurst,' said Mary Crookenden, in her sweet, grave voice; 'will you permit me to recall myself to your remembrance?'

The young girl's proud eyes looked straight into his, the fairy armour gleamed and glistened. Colthurst tried to harden himself against the charm of this exquisite taker of scalps. Tried—yes, it had come to that already. Why, in heaven's name,

couldn't she let him be? Why must she indulge in this wanton bit of coquetry? He asked himself the question with a kind of rage as he bowed silently before her.

'Then certainly I had better depart with all possible despatch'—this vivaciously from Madame Jacobini. 'For Caminada, poor young man, wouldn't in the very least relish my verdict. I have heard him sing already—went through the ordeal a fortnight ago at the Frank Lorimers'. Weedy, weedy little voice, Mr. Carr. No substance in it. Will never do for the stage, believe me, never.'

'I have wished to see you for some time,' Mary went on, with serene gravity. I have wished to thank you. Probably you have forgotten all about it, but you were kind enough to give me some advice when we met abroad this summer.'—She paused in very pretty inquiry. 'You may remember?'

'Yes, I r-remember,' Colthurst said.

'You told me to study. I have obeyed you. I am studying.'

Miss Crookenden's eyes dilated. Her expression was touched with a certain gladness, a certain elevation of sentiment. Her fair, young beauty rose into stateliness, into something very near grandeur just then.

'I have never known how much life could be worth before. I am very happy, and I am very grateful to you,' she said.

'Mary, Mary,' broke in Madame Jacobini, huddling her furs about her angular shoulders, 'pray come. That wretched brougham must have been waiting for

hours. Pray remember we have to drive home, and dress, and dine, and be at the Haymarket by half-past eight.'

There was a frost. The horses' hoofs struck sparks from the stones of the crossings. The lamps burnt with a small, clear flame. The sky was free of cloud, and the stars, keenly bright, sent out sword-thrusts of cold light. Colthurst had business at a well-known artist-colourman's in Long Acre. Crossing St. James's Park, he paused on the bridge spanning the ornamental water. The whole scene, looking towards the Horse Guards and buildings of the Foreign Office, seemed laid in in every shade from steel colour, through blue and blue-purple to positive black. The roar and roll of the streets was loud, culminating from time to time in the yell of an outgoing or in-coming train. A detachment of soldiers marched down Bird-cage Walk, the regular tramp of the men forming a ground tone to patter of drum and shrill squeal of fife. Some water-fowl on one of the islands awoke, fell into commotion and launched forth a noisy fleet, leaving diverging trails of whiteness on the surface of the water as they swam. And the north wind blew piercing, strong and tonic, undefiled by the smoke or human reek of the vast city. It rattled the bare, black branches of the trees, and struck the iron-work of the bridge as with the slap of an open hand.

Colthurst drank it down open-throated. After those warm, luxurious, crowded rooms, its chill was very welcome. He felt uplifted, strengthened, courageous. It came to him as a Wind of Promise out of

the infinite distances of the dancing, star-scattered, blue-black winter night. It told him that the final issues would not be cruel, that for him they would not prove evil but good. It told him his delicate fancies were rooted in fact, that the imagined relation was a real one; that it was true, not false, his words had found entrance and stirred the spirit of that fair woman into nobler, fuller life. It might suit the purpose of light-minded men to conceive her light-minded as themselves. But Colthurst knew better. He alone had divined her aright.

'Oh! there is fire,' he said to himself exultantly, going back on his old thought of her, 'plenty of fire underneath the snow.'

The patter of drums and squeal of fifes, the tramp of marching feet, died away in the distance. The water-fowl, reaching the other shore climbed up with sleepy quackings, leaving long bars of rocking, steel-edged ripples to mark their track. The four quarters chimed, and then Big Ben boomed out the hour, seven, from the Clock Tower. And that strong, clean, untamed wind, a wind as it seemed of promise, still rushed out the uttermost north, bringing good tidings, bidding fear and distrust to cease, calling aloud that the world comes round to those who can dare even more surely than to those who can wait.

Did the wind lie? No, for nature never lies. But like other oracles, hers, alas! often bear a hidden meaning, and find fulfilment which seems to the seeker sadly far away from the first-heard plain song of her speech.

Chapter IV.

Colthurst got the appointment. His offer was accepted in courteous terms. He was glad, gratified. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed to him this was just the opening he needed. Whether, however, his satisfaction would have been so great had he known the whole history of the appointment is doubtful. For the Council had not arrived at their decision without perturbation and anxious discussions, which were not superabundantly complimentary to the subject of them. They had deputed Mr. Carr to find them a convenient King Log. They feared he had, in fact, found King Stork, long red legs, active bill, and all the rest of it. They hoisted danger signals, the older and more conservative among them; spoke of realism, of subversive ideas; feared Colthurst was terribly modern, regrettably young; wailed, in chorus, that he was guilty of that supremest iniquity in the eyes of the respectable English citizens, the iniquity of being unmarried. They pointed out, moreover, that the conduct and practice of the school had already been the subject of criticism and comment on the part of persons given, like Dean Swift's 'nice man,' to the entertaining of 'nasty ideas.' They foresaw that this appointment would give occasion to the enemy, in the form of the British matron, to blaspheme loudly.

Yet how could they refuse with civility? How with any show of reason find any excuse for declining, while Mr. Barwell still continued revolving solitary, wringing his hands? That good man, more-

over, in final desperation of diffidence had great accentuated their difficulties by threatening actual resignation unless a mock-sun of some sort was got into working order without further delay. To accept King Stork then, or close the school—here were the two alternatives. After careful deliberation they chose the former. But of all this Colthurst fortunately knew nothing.

Mr. Barwell's mild countenance, meanwhile, from out its setting of sparse, wavy, gray whisker, appeared to emit a gentle radiance. He was immensely relieved. He looked like a lean and faithful dog which, after long searching, has found its master. There was, if I may say so without indelicacy, a distinct effect of tail-wagging about him. He was thrilled, too, and fluttered. Nights among the flies in the Rhone Valley, days among the salvias in the Alpine pastures come back to him. Erroneous principles and diabolic cleverness, to return to the phrase of his own particular revered Royal Academician, bodily present enthroned, in the heart of his beloved Connop School. To Mr. Barwell this was simply tremendous. He crumpled his long, angular person together on the top of the omnibus which would convey him to town, outside the semi-detached villa at Hampstead—the parrot-nosed sisters watching from the dining-room window, over the top of the wire blind—that raw, foggy January morning, the first of term, with a sense of positively audacious adventure, of unlimited intellectual and emotional electric shocks ahead. For this estimable man of over fifty went forth to meet his new *chef* as a modest

young maiden goes forth to meet the lover, of whom, though he fascinates her, she is more than half afraid.

Owing to the atmosphere of uncertainty which had enwrapped the affairs of the school during the vacation there was to be no opening ceremony at the commencement of term. The Council judged it wisest that King Stork should enter upon his career in the frog-pond quietly, silently, without preliminary flourish of trumpets. Colthurst arrived on the scene early, not caring to run against any of the students until he met them in his official capacity. He betook himself to the office, a bare and businesslike apartment opening on to the flagged hall. The Connop School occupies one side of the inner quadrangle of the new buildings of the College, the high blank back wall of its large drawing theatre being a marked feature in the otherwise monotonous uniformity of Wentworth Street. The office and hall just mentioned are on the first floor, and are approached by a rather handsome flight of steps, in the centre of the *façade* of the quadrangle on the left. The drawing theatre, equal to two stories in height, is on the ground floor; and in the further corner of the office a door gives access to a narrow stone and iron balcony clinging, high up, in the inside wall of it.

Colthurst sat down at the office table. He was conscious of being somewhat nervous and excited. He was in little doubt as to the ultimate result of his relation to these sixty and odd students. He intended getting very complete possession of them; but the process of getting must necessarily take time. It could not be done at first sight, in a minute. And

meanwhile, before the day was out he knew he would have to run the gauntlet of a good deal of pretty trenchant criticism. Instinctively he steeled himself against possible opposition, detraction, even a possible flavour of insolence in the bearing of all these young strangers. He meant to carry the school; but the half-morbid attitude of his mind made him fancy it more than possible he might have to carry it at the point of the bayonet.

The morning grew increasingly foggy. Mr. Barwell armed with the mollifying ointment of his deferential manner, came in for brief consultation. The model had arrived, so had the greater number of the students. But alas! outer darkness invaded the precincts of the theatre. What did Mr. Colthurst think? It was annoying, of course, to be compelled to open proceedings in an irregular manner; annoying that the new director should be introduced to the work of the school under other than its normal conditions; still it seemed a pity to waste the greater part of the morning waiting on the chance of the fog lifting. Would it not be best to decide on a plan of operations at once? Light the gas and give a time-sketch?

In his present humour, waiting was quite the last thing Colthurst cared about.

'I should be uncommonly g-glad to get to work at once,' he replied, leaning his elbow on the office table, and looking up at the tall, amiable, Don-Quixote-like man who bent over him—one hand under his coat-tails, the fingers of the other thrust in between the buttons of his white waistcoat. For Mr. Barwell,

whatever the season of the year, invariably marked his sense of the occasion by putting on a white waistcoat.

'I feel a little like shivering on the b-bank,' Colthurst went on. 'I shall be uncommonly glad to get the first plunge over—you understand? Any arrangements you can make which will enable me to take the header soon and have done with it, will be rather a blessing.'

The under-master shuffled off; his countenance still emitting a gentle radiance. Outside in the hall, he rubbed his lean, long-fingered hands together, with a movement of inexpressible satisfaction. He found the contemplation of his new *chef* positively engrossing.—'He is so amazingly alive,' he said to himself. 'So amazingly, astonishingly alive.'

Meanwhile Colthurst, to fill up the time and keep his sense of nervous impatience within bounds, began reading through the list of students' names, lying open on the office table. First the tri-weekly ones, mostly ladies, none amongst them whom he knew. Then the daily students. The names were arranged alphabetically, and it so happened that he began at the bottom of the page and worked upwards, repeating them mechanically, idly, half-aloud.—'Eliot, William Jenner—Douglas, Alexander—Dicksee, Agnes Kate—Dexter, J. Halbot—Crewdson, George Owen.'—And there he stopped. For the letters, forming the three words standing on the next line above as he glanced at them, performed a queer little war-dance right across the page, and when they settled back into place again were edged round with half

the colours of the prism. An excitable brain, such as Colthurst's, not infrequently plays its possessor these eccentric tricks of vision.

'Crookenden, Mary Coudert,' was what he read when the words ranged themselves once more in sequence.

Colthurst was on his feet with a sort of flash. For a minute he stood staring at the open list lying on the office table. Then he began walking restlessly up and down the room with that quick, quiet, cat-like tread of his. Truth compels me to state that his first feeling was anything but an admirable one. It was little more than the alert, savage joy of the hunter who sees the game he has long been tracking within easy range at last. The Wheel of Fortune as it turned brought about unlooked-for combinations! He found this fair woman, who had seemed so remote, so inaccessible, suddenly by such unlooked-for combination given into his hands. He could see her every day, speak to her every day. If he was careful, watchful, cool enough—and Colthurst just then felt equal to anything—he might develop the fantastic relation he believed he had established with her almost indefinitely. He might learn by heart, not only the outward aspect of the woman, but the aspects of her mind and heart likewise. He might learn the secret of her nature—for each nature has its secret, and till you have learnt it your dealings with that nature are necessarily blundering, bewildered, superficial, incomplete. Having learnt it he might play upon her mind and heart as on some delicate instrument. He thought of Lady Calmady's question

and Hammond's answer. Thought, exultingly, how deliciously chance had given him the whip-hand of alll the crowd of aspirants to the young lady's favour. Thought with peculiar pleasure of the discomfiture of that insolent, thick-witted, young barbarian, Lancelot Crookenden. This then was the meaning of the message of the Wind of Promise, blowing keen and free from among the dancing winter stars out of the blue-black north.

The fog hung like a rusty curtain of crape against the tall office window. The door, already mentioned as leading on to the narrow balcony, was ajar. Colthurst could hear Mr. Barwell's voice at intervals issuing civil, apologetic, conciliatory orders in the theatre below. Could hear a scraping of chairs on the boarded floor, a rattle and slam of easel-trays let hastily down into place. Then a scurry of footsteps across the hall without, echoing on down the spiral stone staircase, accompanied by whistlings, a laugh, snatches of talk in cheery young baritone voices. The opening of a door immediately underneath, a certain confused noise caused by this incursion of male students into the theatre.

Almost unconsciously, hearing these things, Colthurst's mood changed. They brought him back to actuality. His movement of blind, unreasoning satisfaction passed. His feeling rose to a higher plane. And in that rising the inherent dangers and difficulties of his position began to reveal themselves. What had he taken the school for? Not to gratify private desires or promote private ends, but that he might preach a gospel which he believed to be a true

and saving one. From this standpoint Miss Crookenden's presence presented itself less as a triumph than as a temptation. The unlooked-for combinations brought about by the turning of the Wheel of Fortune were not, alas! without an element of irony.

'Carr ought to have warned me,' he said to himself. 'If I had known she was here, I should have withdrawn my offer.'—But in this matter poor Mr. Carr was not really guilty, for he had not known of Miss Crookenden's presence himself. Save on gala days his acquaintance with the school extended no further than the board-room—the Professor discouraging all visits to the studios during working hours. While Mary had rather carefully abstained from giving her friends any clue to the manner in which she elected to spend her time just at present. She had enjoined silence on Madame Jacobini, moreover.—'Don't talk about my going there, Sara,' she had said. 'Then if I do get tired of it and give it up, nobody will bore me by asking why, and obliging me to confess to being, what Lance is pleased to call "changeable," and so make me look foolish. I detest being made to look foolish.' But of this Colthurst was ignorant. He, therefore, fell fiercely upon poor Adolphus in spirit, and mentally tore that somewhat flimsy, though well-preserved person to tatters.

A rending of Mr. Carr asunder, however, was but the briefest of episodes, occupying but one turn across the office and back again. It left Colthurst where it had found him—standing morally opposite to a strangely ironical dilemma, and physically opposite to the half-open door leading on to the stone balcony.

Restlessly, in obedience to a longing for anything that had in it a semblance of escape, he pushed the door wide open and stepped out on to the narrow space. Then stood silent looking down at the scene. In his experience it was a familiar one enough. He had witnessed it, or something analogous to it, hundreds of times already. But familiarity had little influence over Colthurst's imagination. Custom failed to blunt the edge of his perceptions, by rendering that which was familiar also of necessity stale. And to-day the scene held a peculiar meaning and value for him. Dilemma or none, it still was big with hope.

The red-walled theatre looked vast and mysterious under its fog-darkened skylights. There was a telling violence of contrast between the clinging gloom above, and the vivid yellow-tinged glare of the big hooded lamp—the long metal pipe of it writhing down like some huge, black serpent, out of the obscurity of the far-off ceiling—all the strong, uncompromising light of it concentrated on the low platform, where stood the model. A supple, broad featured ox-faced young Italian, curly-headed, stripped, save for the blue and scarlet scarf twisted about his loins. Beautiful, but with the sullen, gross, unintelligent beauty that has got a very little way, as yet, from the beast. His feet were planted well apart. His right arm, and the upper part of his body were thrown forward, as making a lunge in fencing, causing the muscles of back and shoulder to stand out firm and taut under the lustrous skin, from the effort of enforced stillness. Round three sides of the platform a space of boarded floor. Then a semicircular,

wooden-topped railing. And beyond, following the outer curve of it, a forest of close packed chairs and easels; and a company of young men and women, sitting or standing amid an intricate network of sharp-edged light and shadow, cast by the great horse-shoe of gas-burners just over their heads.

Yes, to Colthurst, standing on the narrow balcony gazing down at it, the scene was big with hope. The nobler and baser instincts in him, the intellectual and emotional sides of his nature, wrestled together fiercely just now. For he asked himself, honestly and straight,—hope of what? Should this great, red-walled, fog-dimmed room, with its cunningly directed lights—with the still, strained, naked form of the model, too, in which he saw symbolic suggestion of the sacrificial victim, without whom the rites would be maimed and incomplete—should this be to him the temple in which he, as flamen, would teach men to worship worthily his immortal mistress Art? Or should it be to him only a house of love, dedicated to the adoration of a very fair, but yet a mortal mistress—a mistress from whom, in his saner hours, he knew himself to be divided, not only by wide difference of surroundings and circumstance, but by a moral gulf, which he could cross only over the body of the mother of his child, the body of the woman who should have been his wife?—The struggle was violent, as Colthurst stood there, gazing down. He was conscious of it, acutely, distressingly conscious of it. But as the seconds passed, the nobler instinct gained. Art claimed him first; and to conduct her worship worthily, he must keep himself free, as far

as possible, from sentimental perturbation. And then, his attitude towards Mary Crookenden herself, began to alter. Inaccessible, surrounded by friends, protectors, admirers, she had been fair game. He might dare as he liked, try experiments, do his best to dominate her, and secure her recognition. The advantage remained hers. She was well able to protect herself. But now the parts were reversed. The advantage was his. All the latent chivalry, all the sweeter, gentler elements in Colthurst's strangely complex temperament arose, and called aloud to him to control himself, to restrain himself, not by word or look to compromise her.

'And yet it is hard, very hard,' he said to himself —'just now with this undreamed-of chance given me. —Oh! Jenny Parris, Jenny Parris, what a different world it would be for me to-day, if you and I had not let the flesh and the devil get the upper hand of us ten years ago. You've a lot to answer for.'

And then somehow the remembrance of little Dot came across him, little Dot dancing to the droning sound of the barrel organ on the dreary pavement, among the litter, and dust, and whirling straws.

'And so have I,' he added with a movement of genuine remorse, 'God forgive me—so have I.'

'Ah, I see you are taking a glance at the school, Mr. Colthurst. The numbers are creditable, really very creditable, considering the bad weather, don't you think so?'

The under-master leaned his long back against the door-way, and gently rubbed his hands together under the tails of his coat. He loved the Connop Trust

School as a father loves his child. He wanted the child to be praised. Further, he had a general and most delightfully agitating expectation of fireworks. He wanted Colthurst to go off, so to speak. His little remark represented the application of a mildly tentative match. Poor man, if he had but known, not innocuous top fires, but fires wholly volcanic and destructive were in full play very close to him, just then.

Colthurst, not without an effort, dragged himself up from the floor of his private pandemonium and answered absently.

'Yes, it's an excellent school.'

Both as praise and as fireworks this was disappointing. It did not amount to very much. Mr. Barwell struck another match.

'A new model is always a little incentive to diligence,' he said. 'And a time-sketch gives a pleasant flavour of competition to the work. Then to-day we have the extra incentive of a new directorship you see, Mr. Colthurst.'—A perceptible suggestion of tail-wagging came on.—'Every one here is anxious to produce a favourable impression upon you. We are in no doubt at all as to the ability of our new master, and we are very anxious to oblige him to think highly of our abilities in return.'

But the powder must have got damp somehow. For again Mr. Barwell was disappointed. Colthurst showed no signs of going off. Indeed, tentative matches and the mollifying ointment of flattery alike were wasted upon him at this moment. His own entry upon the balcony, there high up in the gloom,

had been so noiseless that it had passed unobserved. But now, at the sound of voices, a slight movement was perceptible among the students in the theatre below. First one face and then another, flashing into momentary distinctness, had been upturned towards the speakers. The better, nobler side of Colthurst's character was still in the ascendant. It had triumphed so far. Yet he could not help scrutinizing each face in turn with a certain avidity. Then at the far end of the semicircle of easels, he suddenly caught sight of a woman's blonde head. He stepped back into the office.

'We'll go and l-look at the work upstairs in the antique, if you p-please, Mr. Barwell,' he said, stammering badly all at once.

Thus, not with greedy devourings, but with purpose rather of stern and praiseworthy self-repression, did King Stork enter on his reign in the frog-pond.

Chapter V.

Perhaps the inherent force of a nature is shown even more in its passive and negative, than in its active and positive self-expressions. In its power of voluntarily limiting its own horizon; of setting itself arbitrary boundaries; of saying, 'thus far will I go, see, admit- and no further.' For it takes a lot of latent strength to sit, either mntally or physically, really still. Not to fidget. To 'stay put,' in short.—And it was precisely this, mentally and emotionally to sit still, to stay put, that James Colthurst proposed to himself at

this juncture. To live altogether in the present. To limit his horizon, and focus his eyes so as never to see beyond it. To fix an arbitrary boundary, across which his steps should never wander, even in thought. The term at the Connop School comprised about twelve weeks—Easter falling late that year. And the end of term constituted Colthurst's horizon, constituted the boundary he had fixed. After that? He permitted himself to ask no such question. After that probably, in some form or other, the Deluge. But like many persons of strong desires and large purposes, he was something of a fatalist. He did not, therefore, waste and hamper the present by anxious efforts to get ready salvation-arks of gopher or any other species of wood against that possibly diluvian future. If the Deluge was to come, come it most assuredly would. Meanwhile sufficient unto the day was the evil, and likewise the good thereof.

And the days just now, in one direction at all events, had much good in them. Colthurst very soon got those sixty and odd young people, all of them, that is to say, worth the getting, very well in hand. Those who had any wit or gravity of purpose in them he dominated intellectually. Those lighter creatures, in whom gravity was lacking, he carried along with him by the mere momentum of his personality, as a big boulder rolling down the hill-side carries the little loose stones. It is not too much to say that by the end of the first six weeks he possessed the school, had it at his feet. He inspired warm admiration and enthusiasm. He did not inspire friendship. The

conquering natures, I think, rarely inspire that, though they frequently inspire passion.

And so all went well. The very monotony of the daily round of work soothed him. Deference and attention mitigated his irritability. Mr. Barwell, too, was always at hand with offerings of mollifying ointment. Colthurst's old dreams of influence and mastery were coming true. His sheaf stood upright, while the sheaves of those about him did obeisance. And yet, somehow, he was not very elate.

For the effort to observe limitations was a severe one, it produced queer results. And Colthurst was of the number of those persons who have an almost maddening capacity for registering their own sensations. At times the continued effort worked him up to a pitch of emotional excitement which only violent physical exercise could calm. He walked half across London sometimes at night; seeing strange sights, meanwhile, witnessing the sordid, grotesque and various pageant of the streets of the great city as it can only be witnessed when reputable humanity lies safe and warm in bed, and disreputable humanity performs its moral and spiritual dance of death, unrestrained save by the advent of the very occasional policeman. At other times the effort induced in him a certain languor, a kind of pensive ecstasy, not unlike the half stupor produced by a narcotic. Colthurst hailed this singular condition when it came on him, yielded himself up to it unreservedly. The ecstasy seemed to culminate, reaching a degree of almost painful intensity during the five or ten minutes he spent daily standing beside Mary Crook-

enden, or sitting at her easel, although he only spoke to her of technical and impersonal matters, and that, as he tried never to forget, in the presence of a company of shrewd-eyed on-lookers.

Colthurst was really struggling very gallantly to keep faith with the nobler side of his nature. But he felt somewhat like a rope-dancer, always balancing himself, not daring to move freely or look below, lest he should turn giddy, lose his footing and fall headlong. His standard of conduct was set at an almost extravagantly high level. The distance to the ground was very great. To fall headlong would be proportionately dangerous. He perceived that, and the idea of such a fall became not only increasingly alarming, but increasingly disgusting to him. For the ambition of conducting this delicate business to the end with success; of behaving with an ideal sort of chivalry; of being able, when it was all done and over, to look back on this period of his life without hint of self-accusation or self-reproach; of being able to say that in respect of this one woman, at least, his bearing had been Quixotic in the refinement of its honour—the ambition to accomplish this, partly out of reverence for Miss Crookenden herself, partly as an act of expiation, had taken very strong hold of Colthurst's imagination. He almost prayed, fatalist though he was, that his effort to preserve a perfectly neutral attitude towards this beautiful woman, might be taken as payment of former sins against womanhood, might be accepted in liquidation of old bad debts.

He tried to treat her precisely as he treated his other lady pupils. From the first he had ostensibly

taken her presence entirely for granted; had offered her no greeting, had expressed no surprise, no pleasure. With her he was as dogmatic and exacting as with the rest. More so, perhaps; for several times Mary had reason—as she thought—to resent his strictures and accuse his criticism of a degree of quite uncalled-for brutality; but there was no time for protest, for remonstrance. In his quick, deft, cat-like way Colthurst came, pulled her poor work, as she thought rather cruelly, to pieces, and went again. Mary was very much in earnest, hot with the desire to learn, absorbed in her employment; yet, at moments she could not avoid being slightly piqued at Colthurst's—apparently—supreme indifference to her existence. She shut herself up within a stately coldness of manner. And Colthurst thanked her silently yet very devoutly for so doing. It made his position somewhat less trying. For dogmatism and apparent indifference notwithstanding he was all the while acutely conscious of her every movement, of her every gesture, of every inflection of her voice, every detail of her dress—sober now, shorn of all superfluous ornament. He was conscious, too, of each delicate change in the waxen whiteness of her complexion, of the shade of red-brown which tinged her eyelids as towards evening she grew tired from work in the hot dry atmosphere of the studios. All this Colthurst knew by instinct, for he avoided looking at her as much as he could. Any responsive kindling or softening of those beautiful eyes might prove the straw too much, and make him lose his balance. Ah! such rope-dancing at this, going on day after day, week after

week, must needs be too heavy a strain on any man's nerves, unless he is made of ice and iron, rather than ordinary flesh and blood. Short of a moral miracle, loss of balance and consequent fall would seem inevitable.

Perhaps the moral miracle might have been worked, and Colthurst thereby enabled to hold out to the appointed end of his risky performance—it is pleasant, any way, to imagine it would have been so—had not Jenny Parris, with her incurable habit of riding to lose rather than win in the race of life, managed to give the tight-rope a shake which of necessity precipitated a catastrophe.

It happened thus. Jenny was ill. The winter weather increased that nasty dragging cough of hers. She slept badly, sickened at the sight of food, fell into a state of depression that stirred much kindliness and much indignation in the ample bosom of Mrs. Prust. About the middle of January the state of affairs appeared so very serious to that excellent woman, that she went the length of packing her gouty and most unwilling master-mariner into a square cab, and sending him off to Kensington to look up Colthurst. Captain Prust's moral courage was not proportionate to his irascibility, and this mission of remonstrance and rebuke was not in the very least to his taste. To his unspeakable relief Colthurst was out. He, therefore, contented himself by leaving a long rambling message calculated to obscure rather than set forth the truth.

'But he'll know all about it soon enough,' he said to himself on the return journey, spitting reflectively from the window of the square cab in the intervals of

a consolatory pipe. 'Lord love you, S'lome's crowding on sail. If she catches him she'll let him have it hot.'

In response to the enigmatic message Colthurst called at Delamere Crescent; and, regardless of top dressings of coals of fire prepared by Mrs. Prust, soon called again. It was very painful to him to do so. That the ugly side of his life should clutch and hold him just now seemed rather cruel. But there is a fertilising power in all moral effort. Colthurst, trying honestly to do nobly in one direction, began to do at least not ignobly in others. He was really very kind to Jenny at this period; kind in the little material, unromantic ways which, for some reason, are so curiously comforting to a woman's heart. He brought her dainties, and coaxed her to eat, sitting meanwhile—his broad shoulders and square head silhouetted against the dingy window overlooking a long perspective of barren back yards—on the corner of the chest-of-drawers that occupied all the space between her untidy bed and the opposite wall of the narrow room. I do not wish to sentimentalize over James Colthurst. He was, to put it colloquially, plenty big enough to take care of himself. Yet somehow it strikes me as not a little pathetic, illustrative of the relentless dragging apart of the very foundations that may be taking place in careers apparently covered with brilliant success, to watch him go thus from reigning tyrant-like over all those clever young people at the Connop School, from inhaling the incense of good Mr. Barwell's reverent admiration, from the promulgation of his gospel of art, from his

silent adoration of so delicate and exquisite a product of high civilization as Mary Crookenden,—to sit on the corner of a chest-of-drawers in a cheerless, littered, stuffy lodging-house bedchamber, and help, with champagne and oysters, and Brand's essence, and grapes and what not, to keep life in the woman whose final and permanent exit from life would have been the solution of so many problems, the easing of so many distresses for him. If we set forth the man's bad moments, at least let us set forth his good ones as well; remembering the divinely comfortable saying that there is greater joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over the ninety-and-nine just persons who have no cause for repentance.

And Colthurst did more than spend his substance in Heidsieck and oysters; though not being very flush of money just now, that was tax enough in itself. His work at the Connop School had compelled him to postpone the finishing of the portrait mentioned by Adolphus Carr, and of another which he had been painting. It is true the Council had not accepted his proposal of giving his services, but the salary they could offer him as *locum tenens* was but a small one. Colthurst began to find the disagreeable old question of ways and means staring him in the face again by the beginning of February. He took radical measures to meet it. He underlet the grand studio in Kensington to Horatio Deland, the thought-reader, who happily fancied it as presenting an attractive environment for *seances* and other entertainments of a pseudo-scientific, pseudo-necromantic description, in which that undulating spinster, Miss Dampier,

Lady Theodosia Pringle, and other children of whom one charitably trusts Wisdom may one day be justified—that day I admit appears a long way off yet—enthusiastically took part. He installed himself meanwhile in a couple of rooms in a house just opposite the College entrance in Wentworth Street; and removed his two Academy picitures to a small unused studio at the top of the school buildings, in which he contrived to do a fair amount of painting at odd hours. By these means he reduced current expenses sufficiently to be able to send Jenny away to a sheltered place on the south coast for three weeks, where little Dot built sand castles, decorated with whelk-shells and semi-defunct star-fish and other marine curiosities of high value, and danced around them in the frail spring sunshine, as gaily defiant of the incoming tide as though no ugly bar-sinister defaced her little private escutcheon and rendered her a wholly inconvenient and uncalled-for addition to the millions of the human race. Jenny came back very much the better for sea-breezes. She ate. She slept. The sense of returning health was almost intoxication to her. Her spirits went up with a rush. From pure lightness of heart she was tempted to give the tight-rope that fatal shake.

It fell out thus. Colthurst had, more than once, complained to his colleague of the costume models who sat for the female students in the class-room upstairs three times a week.

'What is the possible use,' he said, 'of having one sleek Italian girl after another, with no more meaning behind her great, brown heifer's eyes than one

of the ruminants she, in her peaceable moments, so much resembles? If we could have the girls as they look at home, in Fetter Lane say, when the devil gets into them, and white teeth show, and a knife glitters out in the yellow gas-light, there might be some object in drawing them. As it is, they are only a degree less unprofitable, less likely to fill our students' heads with false notions of beauty, than that pantheon of stucco pagan deities in the antique. Can't you get us a few Englishwomen whose beauty lies in something more intelligible and intelligent? Women who have lost their baby-face and have acquired the aspect of ordinary, reasonable human beings, with a past behind and salvation or damnation ahead of them?'

Poor Mr. Barwell groaned a little inwardly at this cheapening of the accredited Italian type and backhanded slap at the antique. But Colthurst's word was law. So the amiable man hastened to put himself in communication with Miss Annie Sutton, an English model of unassailable respectability and considerable popularity, requesting her to pass the word to other members of the professional sisterhood.

'I am happy to say I believe we have found just the person we require,' the under-master announced, mildly radiant, meeting Colthurst in the office a few days later. 'Not too young, the baby-face you so object to conspicuous by its absence—a fine figure for drapery. She tells me she had the honour of standing to you several times a few years ago.'

For various reasons Colthurst was not ardently desirous of renewing the acquaintance of a few years ago. Just now he was engaged in turning down his

trousers, the morning was warm and showery, and the pavements slushy; he straightened himself up rather sharply.

'W-what's her name?' he asked.

'Harris,' Mr. Barwell replied, a trifle surprised at the other's abruptness. 'She gave it as Jane Harris.'

Colthurst completed the operation of turning down his trousers. A most unpleasant suspicion occurred to him; but he thrust it aside as preposterous and consequently abominably unjust.

'I never heard of the woman in my life,' he declared with a certain violence of denial.

'Very likely not,' Mr. Barwell hastened to say. 'But even models have the weakness, common to human nature, of embroidering truth slightly in furtherance of their own interests. A good many models whom you have never heard of in your life, Mr. Colthurst, I fancy, are tempted to use your name as a passport at present—that is one of the taxes levied on celebrity. But the worst of having English models is that they will chatter. They bring the gossip of half the studios in London here, and dribble it out to our students during the rests, and very doubtfully improving gossip a great deal of it is, too.'

Colthurst moved towards the office door. His expression was anything but benign.

'This woman must be told plainly we shall be obliged to her to hold her tongue, then,' he said, rather brutally.

The under-master shuffled after him, his countenance irradiated by an indulgent smile. The observation of Colthurst's different phases afforded him end-

less food for meditation. 'Amazingly vigorous,' he said to himself, 'never two days alike.' Then he added aloud:—

'Yes, she shall be told, Mr. Colthurst. But a prohibition may not act as an effectual gag, I fear. In dealing with the fair sex silence is not always altogether easy to enforce, you know.'

For, in truth, Mr. Barwell hankered after his heifer-eyed Italians. Human beings with a past behind and salvation or damnation ahead of them appeared to him somewhat exhausting. He was getting up in years; and when the magnetism of Colthurst's genius was lifted off him, he had no particular longing to knock his amiable bird-like head against any of the innumerable insoluble problems of human existence.

Colthurst ran quickly down stairs into the theatre. The young men were working there alone; and this usually was the occasion for his affording them much gratuitous instruction in the philosophy of art. But this morning he was harassed by that same suspicion. He could not divest his mind of it. The suspicion was preposterous he admitted. Yet Colthurst's imagination continued to play with it, to return to it to develop it, to see all that it might possibly mean and bring along with it, while repeating that it was preposterous and wholly inadmissible. And he perceived, moreover, that his hands were tied in respect of it; and that to cross-question Mr. Barwell was to court the exposure of that he so earnestly desired to keep hid. Fifty times he told himself the suspicion was an insanity. Fifty times he asked himself what

on earth he should do if it proved correct? The name too, sickened him. Jane Harris—if it was an *alias*, what depths of pitiful absurdity, poverty of invention there had been in the selection of it.

It is needless to state that these meditations did not tend to make Colthurst pleasant company. When he left the theatre more than one young gentleman permitted himself to remark that 'The Boss was in the beastliest of beastly tempers to-day;' that he looked 'as black as pitch;' and that his criticisms were positively malignant in their severity. The students upstairs, in the antique, fared little better. A dreadful legend exists, but I refuse to vouch for the truth of it, that one soft-hearted damsel striving zealously to 'shade in the contours of time-honoured Discobolus,' was actually heard by her near neighbours to emit sounds suggestive of stifled weeping when he quitted her easel. This I trust was an exaggeration; yet undoubtedly Colthurst induced considerable sensations of alarm in more than one of his pupils. A certain blackness and malignancy really did seem to emanate from him which was extremely disconcerting to weak nerves. It was hardly surprising. Pushed, pestered, haunted by that preposterous suspicion, his whole being was in revolt.

Mary Crookenden had arrived rather late. She had hardly got her tools into order when Colthurst entered the school. He perceived this, as he usually did perceive, at first glance how this particular young lady was employed, and decided, though her place was nearly in the centre of the room, to leave his lesson to her till among the last. She was drawing

Wrestlers; but the outline of the two figures, crushed together in their fixed, unending struggle, was barely complete as yet. Mary used charcoal well, delicately and freely. Her lines had meaning and value. Her drawing possessed that indefinable something which makes all the difference. She saw that presented to her freshly, unconventionally, as for the first time. She had a native gift of style.

Colthurst—having completed his tour of the school—now standing just behind her looking at her sketch of the two straining figures, was aware of this; and, notwithstanding his ill humour and disquieting suspicions it gave him pleasure. There was grip and vivacity in the sketch. Miss Crookenden, sensible of his presence, slipped off her high wooden chair, and stood on one side. Her movements were deliberate, to the point of indolence. Her face was vacant of expression. Her eyelids, with that brownish tinge upon them, drooped a little over her eyes. She wore a very plain grey gown, and a large white linen apron with a bib to it. She rested the butt-end of her maulstick on the ground and waited, attentive, silent, cold.

Colthurst leaned both hands on the back of her vacant chair, glanced from the drawing-board to the group of statuary and back again.

'This is a good sketch,' he said presently. 'It is accurate, and it is more than that. To take an original and imaginative view of these very familiar p-plaster idols is by no means easy; but in the present case you strike me as having come very near performing that remarkable feat.'

He leaned back, holding the chair at arm's length,

tipping the front legs of it off the ground. Looked carefully at the drawing again, running his eyes rapidly, steadily over the bowed backs and strained, bent limbs. Then he looked full at Miss Crookenden. Hunted as he was and badgered by that preposterous suspicion, he grew reckless of danger. Neither the fever fit nor the languidly ecstatic fit of love was on him, but only a sombre sense of rebellion. If his suspicion was correct, before the day was out he would be put to the torture. In the interval he would stint himself of no fair sight that might chance to come in view.

'Yes, this is good,' he repeated. 'I am proud of you, I congratulate you heartily, Miss Crookenden, on your work.'

The compliment was startling in its unexpectedness. Mary did not move; but she was very much gratified. She could not help showing her gratification. She raised her head a little, raised her eyelids.

'Thanks,' she said. 'I am very glad you think well of it.'

And Colthurst found himself staring into the luminous depths of her eyes.

After the long course of abstinence to which he had condemned the emotional side of his nature so rigorously, his sensation for the instant was little short of rapture. He forgot everything in the delight of Miss Crookenden's beauty and that gracious expression of pleasure that had come into her charming face.

But the rapture was of brief duration. For the suspicion, which for the instant he had beaten off as a wounded creature beats off the vultures drawing near

to tear before their time, hopped evilly back again, even as the vultures hop, settled, stretched out its ugly neck and vicious beak. Colthurst's imagination had gone to work again, and it flashed upon him the suggestion of a combination outrageous, hateful, in its incongruity. At all events, that must not be realized, come what might. Not on his own account—Colthurst cared very little about saving his own skin, just then—but because it offered an insult to Miss Crookenden which his mind refused to contemplate. The thought of it trenched on madness.

At the first hop of the returning vulture he had turned once more to Miss Crookenden's drawing-board. And the young lady was glad of this. For though Colthurst's indifference had piqued her sometimes, she assured herself it was infinitely preferable to any recurrence of the eccentric bearing to which he had treated her on the occasion of their first meeting. Mary tried to forget that first meeting. It had been most disagreeable. Since then, Colthurst had done a great deal for her. She was very grateful to him. She was interested in him. More interested, possibly, than she quite admitted. His approval of her drawing had given her acute satisfaction. But she hoped to goodness he was not going to manifest any eccentricities again.

All this takes long to put into words. It occupied a very short time in fact. Mary had barely remarked Colthurst's odd way of regarding her, felt relieved when it ceased, before he spoke.

'W-what shall you be doing this afternoon?' he asked.

'Mr. Barwell told me to begin painting from the costume model. You remember, no doubt, we have a fresh one to-day.'

Colthurst leaned forward and neatly swept a few loose crumbs of charcoal off the surface of the gray paper.

'I d-do not see that you are likely to gain any p-particular benefit by painting the costume model,' he said, speaking very rapidly in that hissing, hesitating way of his. 'Costume m-models are rather cheap after all. If you want to work from them you can do so at any time—have them in your own studio at home—you know.'—Colthurst paused.—'I—I should much prefer your giving more time to anatomy. You may not have opportunities of studying it later—when you leave here, I mean. The theatre will be vacant this afternoon; take this sketch down there, and with the help of the skeleton, and the anatomical figure, and the plates in Fau, try to put the bones into this upper figure and make an *écorché* of the lower one. Barwell shall bring you the Vesalius out of the library, if you like. It would be c-capital practice for you. It would test your knowledge. It would teach you a lot.'

He flicked off another crumb of charcoal. His heart beat in his ears. It seemed an age waiting, till Miss Crookenden's grave voice answered—'Very well. If you wish it. But it is rather a severe task.'

Colthurst looked up.

'I d-do wish it,' he stammered. 'I wish it very much.'

Mary could not help smiling, and that sweetly. She

felt a strange pity, all at once, for this strong, dogmatic, domineering man. The unprofessional side of things intruded itself, somehow, for the first time in their daily intercourse. She could not resist making him a playful little speech.

'You are master. Clearly it is for you to command, and for me to obey.'

Colthurst's eyes were fixed on the drawing-board. The vulture had hopped a little way off again; but only a little way. It sat watching.

'Thanks,' he said, quite gently. 'In this case I have no doubt it will be best for you to obey.'

Chapter VI.

As Colthurst came into the class-room adjoining his studio, the costume model—had any of the ladies present observed the fact, which, being engaged with their own appearance and performances in view of the entrance of the master, they happily did not—narrowed her eyes in uncontrollable inclination towards laughter. The movement was irresistible, instantaneous. She mastered it, and again was absolutely still, save for the steady rise and fall of her bosom in breathing.

Jenny had thrown herself into one of the semi-tragic, Sibylline attitudes which suited her height and large frame so well. She wore a—so-called—Greek robe of faded indigo-coloured woollen; the material of it thin and pliant enough to indicate the outline of her finely-moulded limbs. It was fastened on either

shoulder, leaving the whole of the arms bare, and was girdled cross-wise on the chest and under the bosom with narrow bands of tarnished gold embroidery. Her back was towards Colthurst as he entered. She sat side-ways on her chair, one arm lying along the top bar of it, the other hanging straight down at her side. Her left knee was dropped as in half kneeling, and the soft blue draperies caught aside disclosed her bare foot. Jenny, as we know, was well aware of the beauty of her feet, and on the subject of displaying them she and Mr. Barwell had had a smart little skirmish when he had come some hour and a half earlier to pose her. She had already whipped off her over-skirt and claret-coloured ulster, and was sitting on one end of the platform calmly divesting herself of her boots and stockings.

'I think we needn't trouble you to do that, Miss Harris,' he had observed, mildly.

'Excuse me,' Jenny had answered very promptly, 'but I don't agree. Why, the robe's nowhere with a pair of muddy boots under it. I am a pretty seasoned hand at this business, and I tell you I'd rather not stand at all than do the thing shabbily.' She threw back her head with a laugh. 'And it'll be a good lesson, in more ways than one, for your students to see a shapely foot for once. I'll warrant most of their own are crooked and cramped enough, what with pointed toes and high heels, and all the rest of it.'

Poor Mr. Barwell gave in. In truth, this model struck him as a rather embarrassing lady. He sighed for his ruminant Italians again. And it had required all his moral courage and sense of duty to enable him

to speak to her about the high desirability of maintaining silence during the rests.

'Oh! those are the orders, are they?' she said, not without darkening of anger in her handsome face. 'I understand. You can make yourself easy. I'm not going to talk.'—Mentally she called the amiable undermaster a 'frightful old granny,' and despised him from the bottom of her heart.

But once in position Jenny became utterly motionless—her eyes wide open looking out as to an infinite distance from under the cloud of hair massed low on her forehead. Probably she inherited this power of entire immobility from generations of sea-going ancestors—from men who had sat, hour after hour, in dreamy silence on the deck of some white-sailed vessel, staring across the vast furrowed plains of blue-green water; or who, when ashore, had lounged on the wall guarding the rocky road up from Beera Quay, in the crannies of which tiny ferns cluster and penny-pies root their round red-stemmed succulent leaves and spires of greenish flower, gazing away and away, in idle quiescent contentment, out to sea.

It speaks well for Colthurst's courage that finding his preposterous suspicions realized, seeing Jenny posing there in the indigo-colored robe he knew so well, he managed to repress all outward signs of excitement. He had divined rightly, then. At first it was not fear of a scene and of consequent exposure which made Colthurst sicken inwardly and curse himself and this unruly being bound to him by an unacknowledgable tie. Rather was it the revelation of the grossness of her levity in having conceived the idea of

coming here; and the hatefulness of her actual presence, desecrating this place, in which some of the highest impulses and purest emotions of his life had been granted him. This was the reward he was to have, then, for the sacrifices he had so lately been making for her. This was the return for all his efforts to pay off old bad debts. To Jenny, lying ill in that untidy bed-chamber in Mrs. Prust's lodging-house, he could be kind, tender, if needs be. But for Jenny obtruding herself here, for Jenny playing this horrible comedy, for Jenny under the same roof as Mary Crookenden, Colthurst feared he had no mercy.

And then, as he began to pass from easel to easel, Jenny's face and form became to him as one of those terrible, ever-changing, yet ever stable forms and faces seen in delirium. It was everywhere. Here by the door, an outline of brow, and cheek, and chin, the fine curve of the nape of her neck and shoulder. Next, three or four samples of her profile; the three-quarters face, then the full face, worn yet handsome —the sad, still, grey eyes seeming to ask of the future, and of him, too—that was the intolerable burden of it—the righting of some great wrong once done her. Then the three-quarters face again, with the turning of the horse-shoe of easels. The profile; and so back once more to the somewhat too accentuated outline of brow, and cheek and chin; and on this side the raised arm and drooping hand, lying along the top of the chair-back.—Everywhere, wherever he looked, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny. A world of Jennies. Jenny angelic and Jenny demonic. Jenny feebly inadequate, elegant, barber-block-like, innocuous, full of shrinking

propriety. Jenny exaggerated, fierce, Cassandra-like, portentous, and fateful. Jenny frankly absurd and ridiculous; caricatures of her emphasizing every unhappy trait, every doubtfully graceful line of her. Every student, of all the twenty there, absorbed in the thought of Jenny. All the twenty right hands, there, busy reproducing an image of Jenny. All the forty eyes, there, dwelling, lingering, in close and careful scrutiny upon Jenny. And in the midst of them, uplifted, enthroned, silent, motionless, sphinx-like, Jenny herself, the living, breathing woman,—listening, he felt, to his lightest footfall, hearing his every word, counting his heart-beats, knowing, though in her present posture she could not see him, that the dull red flush had come up over his sallow skin, that his breath was short, that it was just all he could do to steady his arm sufficiently to handle a brush or hold a stick of charcoal.

And yet, hideous as it was, Colthurst saw he must go through with it. That, in bare self-defence, he must continue to stand unconcernedly beside each one of these twenty easels in turn; and treat each one of the twenty young ladies seated at them—diligent, respectful, in some cases clever and well-bred women—to a series of criticisms, conceived in a calm and judicial spirit, upon their presentment of lips he had kissed, of eyes that had wept over him, of hands that had tended him with untiring ministry in sickness. If he gave way, if he flinched, if ever so slight a lapse occurred in the authoritative indifference of his official manner, if he forgot for ever so short a space

that he was here as Director of the Connop Trust School, instructing a class of lady students in drawing and painting—as was their custom three days a week—from a professional costume model, hired to stand for the sum of one shilling and sixpence per hour, he was aware he should no longer be able to count on Jenny. Her silence, her discretion might be swept away in some wild outrush of personal feeling. She might blast his name, his position, his prospects by an unpermissible revelation of the relation which existed between them.

Colthurst felt like a man shut in a cage with a half-tamed lion. A false step, a slip, an instant of nervousness, and the beast might be at his throat. The tension was tremendous. Once he thought all was lost.

He had worked his way half round, was nearly opposite to Jenny, when one of the students, just beyond, seated in the left-hand corner of the room, after consulting her watch, hung on the apex of her easel, called—'Time.'

Jenny rose. Stretched herself—she was a trifle cramped—with a superb disregard of observation, throwing her body back from the waist, while she clenched her hands and held them first straight out, then above her head. She laughed a little as she did so, quite good-humouredly, looking across at Colthurst—just then declaiming to a plain, industrious young lady on the muddy opacity of her flesh tints—with a very devil of mischief lurking in her eyes.

And in justice to Jenny, it must be asserted that she had a most limited conception of the suffering she

was inflicting on her former lover. She was feeling better, stronger after that dreary spell of illness. She longed for a little change, a dash of excitement, amid the dull sameness of her life. Poor, silly soul, she loved posing, loved striking an attitude, commanding admiration, loved having a roomful of people staring at her by the hour together. Loved to hear her 'points' discussed, to hear comments on her fine figure. Loved to sport that same indigo-coloured robe, with its strips of tarnished embroidery. Loved to occupy a position of importance—even at the price of eighteenpence an hour. As she had said herself, she was only nine-and-twenty after all. Her tastes were not refined, I admit, but that did not prevent her desiring to gratify them ardently. Jim had been good, very good, to her lately. Her hopes had risen. She could understand—he had made her do that pretty plainly—that he could not have her at his studio. But this public art-school was quite another matter—so it seemed, at least to poor, short-sighted Jenny. She wanted so badly to know what it was all like; wanted to see Jim, in whose company she had come so near starving, set up as a great man, filling a post not disdained by a member of the Royal Academy itself. Jenny—it is piteous to think of all it implies as one writes it—had offered herself as model at the Connop School in pure lightness of heart. She longed for a frolic. She thought it would be a rare bit of fun to play this practical joke on James Colthurst.

As luck would have it, too, the day was peculiarly windless and mild. Such moist, close, spring weather

suited Jenny well. Her cough then gave her little trouble; and the damp air made her skin smooth and fair. She and Dot and Mrs. Prust had made quite merry in the grim sitting-room in Delamere Crescent, fastening up the blue robe under her dress-skirt, and getting the claret-coloured ulster to sit with some little air of fashion and smartness over the miscellaneous garments worn beneath it. The pink almonds were in flower in one of the squares through which she passed. Always generous and improvident, she had bestowed quite a large sum in coppers on beggars and crossing-sweepers, and had gone on her way delighted by their vociferous blessings. She had met women selling bunches of yellow Lent lilies. Lent lilies grow in profusion on the banks of the glebe fields just around Beera Church. She remembered racing down in breathless haste, many a time, from afternoon school to gather them, with a company of bright-eyed, carmine-cheeked, little maidens like herself. The soft moisture of the spring day reminded her of the dear West country, too. Poor Jenny—one's heart bleeds for her!—she was happy, gentle, tender-hearted, full of shy hopes and pretty memories as she set out on her disastrous fool's errand to the Connop School at noon.

Tenderness had given place to another order of emotion now, yet Jenny was still gay. She was a good deal impressed, it is true, by the dignity which surrounded James Colthurst, by the deference with which she observed he was spoken of and treated. But she had not been unaware of the slight movement of self-consciousness, a trifle of that amiable desire

which all right-minded young women exhibit to appear to the best advantage on finding themselves in the presence of a member of the opposite sex, among the assembled students when the master came into the room. And this, although it aroused her jealousy slightly, was highly diverting to her. She had not any wish or intention of compromising Colthurst, far from that. But she was amused, on the alert, observant; and she laughed as she looked at Jim by way of gathering him into the joke—just to let him know it.

Colthurst retained his composure.

'Your shadows are not nearly warm enough,' he was saying. 'They are too grey. Your flesh tones will be decidedly harsh and false unless you modify them.'

The young lady assented ruefully, humbly.

'Just hold up your canvas, please,' he went on doggedly. 'Match the basis of colour as you have it against the model's face and neck. Do you see, now? I am sorry to tell you this is lamentably weak.'

Colthurst drew himself up, and raised his voice, addressing the whole class:—

'I wish you to understand, once and for all, ladies, that weakness, either in conception or execution, is in my opinon the un—p-pardonable sin. It may be taken as an axiom in all d-departments of arts, that where there is strength there is hope. Weakness, feebleness, are hopeless. I remark an inclination among you, if you will p-pardon my speaking frankly, to be enamoured of the pretty-pretty, of that feebleness

which it is the fashion to disguise under the p-plea of refinement.'

Jenny's laugh had exasperated Colthurst beyond endurance. She stood lazily resting her hands on the top-rail of her chair. A magnificent creature, notwithstanding past hard-living, and recent illness, in her flowing garments, with that sharp-edged mocking smile upon her full lips. Colthurst gave her a straight glance from under his heavy brows. The line across his forehead was cut deep, and his restless, fanatical eyes had a wicked expression in them.

'It is because I want to correct this inclination in you, ladies,' he went on, 'that I have requested Mr. Barwell to engage no more Italian models for you at p-present. I am anxious you should have more solid and less superficially pleasing material to study from. I b-beg you to throw aside all thoughts of the pretty-pretty, all longings after refinement. Those longings will not be gratified. I b-beg you to understand that this model is not selected because she offers you any approach to an ideal type of beauty. We p-propose dropping beauty for a time, and giving you the wholesome tonic of average fact. I b-beg you, therefore, to draw and paint, in as far as you are able, precisely what you see. There are imperfections in your subject. State them. I desire no softening d-down, no finicking attempts to present a grace or charm which is absent in the original; no squeamish ignoring of what may appear to you common or coarse.'

Colthurst paused. The sound of his own words heightened his excitement, his sense of the wrong

done, the insult offered him. He had begun striking that dangerous wild beast—to pick up our old illustration again—in self-defence. But his blood was up. Too soon he struck, not in self-defence, but for the mere brutal pleasure of striking.

Jenny listened in growing horror of amazement. Gradually the enormity of her own folly dawned upon her. Colthurst's voice and manner cowed her, and she slunk back to her seat again; and bent her head low as she arranged her voluminous blue draperies.

'I d-demand that your work be perfectly honest and straightforward,' he continued, 'right down on the lines of life as you know it. Personally I should prefer your drawing from models wearing their ordinary every-day clothes—putting all question of costume, another name for silly, showy, theatrical dressing-up—aside. When the æsthetic sense of the British public is so highly developed that it has become customary for women to trail about the dirty streets there outside in Greek robes, it will be quite time enough, to my thinking, for you to study the folds of them. Is the rest up?' he asked, turning abruptly upon the possessor of the watch in the right-hand corner of the room.

She answered very hurriedly in the affirmative, having a sense that the air, for cause unknown, was most disagreeably overcharged with electricity; and 'wishing really,' as she subsequently remarked, in the ladies' cloak room, 'that if Mr. Colthurst had things like that to say—of course he was quite right in theory—but if he wanted to say those sort of

things he wouldn't say them before the model, because really it made one feel so dreadfully hot and uncomfortable, you know.'

Jenny, meanwhile, raised her bowed head, tried to settle herself back into position. But her sight was all blurred. She could not make out the chalk marks for her feet. Her heart beat so fast, that it shook her whole frame. She could hardly keep her arms or body still.

Colthurst watched her steadily for a minute, in silence. Then he threaded his way between the intervening easels, and went up close to the platform.

'You have shifted your position,' he said, still speaking in the same unnaturally loud, hard voice. 'I must trouble you to bring your left arm more this way. Yes—so—that's better. And the mark for your foot is at least two inches further back. There—that'll do.'

As she stooped down to rearrange the edge of the drapery about her foot, Jenny gave Colthurst one look of desperate, despairing entreaty. He was so close to her she could have touched him.

'Jim!' she said, with a gasp under her breath.

As her lips moved Colthurst started back, bringing his elbow into collision with the tray of the nearest easel—sending plummet, crayons, stumps, and charcoal rattling on to the ground.

There was a depth of pettiness and miserable meanness in his action which was abhorrent to him. It was disgusting, but it saved the situation. With profuse apologies for his awkwardness he bent down and recovered the scattered drawing materials; then

moved quickly back to his former place, and went on with his lesson once more. Alas! poor, short-sighted, foolish, impossible Jenny, is this the wretched end of your frolic? or is there worse—you begin to fear it—behind?

The lion dared not spring now. He had very effectually beaten the creature into submissive humility. There would be no scandal. He would see Jenny to-night or some time to-morrow in Delamere Crescent. She should break her engagement. She should put in no second appearance, that was very certain. Colthurst had no fear but that he could secure himself against any repetition of this persecution. But still it seemed to him that she had done him an unpardonable injury. She had rendered his high efforts abortive. Coarsely, wantonly she had rubbed the bloom off his work and off his love. Here, in this place, where the ugly past had seemed to be falling from him, releasing him from so much that he loathed as low and disgraceful here where he had made a really gallant effort to work out his salvation, here Jenny had come and claimed him; strongly, if silently, had laid her hands upon him; had shamed and outraged him—in his own eyes, in any case. Yes, let us try to hold the balance even. The suffering, the injury, were by no means all on the woman's side.

How Colthurst got through the remainder of the lesson he hardly knew. For still around him everywhere was the pictured horror of Jenny's face and figure. The face that had made his fortune. The face he had painted in his now famous 'Road to Ruin'—the picture which, as he knew, was travelling

over the length and breadth of England, drawing a crowd of interested spectators to the library or fine arts gallery of a hundred watering places and provincial towns.—And there in the midst still, her laughter dead, her spirit broken, beaten into submission by the lash of his cruel tongue, motionless, speechless, as a being under the blighting curse of some weird spell, Jenny herself—Jenny, poor soul, who, thanks to him, had wandered so many weary steps along that same road to ruin now.

At last it was over. The door was shut between them; and Colthurst stood on the flagged landing outside, alone.

Chapter VII.

The relief of being outside there alone was great. Now that the strain was over Colthurst felt utterly worn out. The lower sash of the high, narrow landing-window had been thrown up. He leaned his elbows on the window-sill. The moist spring air was welcome to him.

The sun had come out, and glistened on the wet slated roofs of the college buildings opposite. Below, in the centre of the quadrangle, some sparrows played about the shallow stone basin, which, with its attenuated squirt of water, relieved the uninteresting uniformity of the surrounding asphalt pavement. Colthurst noted these things, noted them with the vacant sort of observation which goes no further than eye and ear, awakening no responsive movement of the intelligence. Noted the heavy masses of steam-

ing purplish vapour, sun-gilded here and there, trailing away above the city to eastward. Noted the hoarse roar of the traffic, setting to and from the great railway terminus whose rounded, glazed roofs to the left gave off a wide dazzle of misty brightness. Noted, too, that the sharp impudent chirping of the sparrows detached itself from that continuous roar like points of light from a sombre background.

Colthurst was very miserable as he leaned on the window-sill and gazed down into the sloppy quadrangle. The deluge had come. And it appeared to be an universal one. Usually he was self-sufficing enough, but now his self-confidence deserted him. He was swept under by a tide of all-embracing scepticism. Turn where he would there seemed no hope, no comfort left. For, as is the case with so many of us when the world goes ill with us, Colthurst was guilty of the egotism of shifting the blame from his own shoulders on to those of the general constitution of things; of making the universal economy, in short, responsible for the consequences of his own none too virtuous actions. It was excusable perhaps, for he was very tired. Much of his depression was physical, no doubt, the result of acute nervous exhaustion. Yet, as is the way of persons troubled by excitable brains, while his body actually ached from weariness, his mind worked with feverish exaggerated activity, presenting to him a procession of disjointed images in which a very sufficient spirit of pessimism found vent.

'If one could only stop the machinery for an hour or two,' he said to himself, 'and get a rest! Expunge

thought and feeling, put out one's eyes, shut one's ears, sit dumb, blind, solitary in the void. If there is a void—but that's just the intolerable wear and tear of it, there is no void, no space of silence and quiet. Everywhere energy, force, drive. Everywhere a crowd, a hideous jostling crowd of things struggling to be born; struggling to make themselves heard and felt; struggling to push something else aside so as to make their word, their want, their meaning known. And all to no purpose. Their word is emptiness, their want fruitless, their meaning *nil*. For the circle is never broken; nothing, nobody, can even break out of it and be free. The great mill-stones turn and turn on themselves eternally, grinding down each generation—man, beast, all living beings alike—into food for the coming generations, which in due time will be ground down too. If one could only remember that, be passive, be careless, refuse to expect, refuse to fight. But then comes in the infernal malice of the whole conception. Good care has been taken to make us so that we must expect, must fight. For the sake of keeping the gigantic farce in full play we are tricked with an innate conviction of our own power, freedom, personality, tricked by the flattering conceit that it is not only possible but incumbent upon us to act, and create, and believe, and find out.'

Colthurst rested his head in both hands.

'That the race may continue, and so the great mills never lack grist, that the great lie may thrive, burgeon out, grow fatter and fuller, as the ages go forward, it is to further this end and this only, that

our mothers conceive us, bring us forth with strong crying and tears, suckle us with an infinitude of brooding tenderness; that we ourselves push up, love, suffer, aspire, live our lives without stint. Maimed and degraded, triumphant and sainted, genius, idiot, or good, ordinary, thick-witted philistine alike,' he said, 'there's no escape for any of us. We're all shot into the hopper and ground down at last.'

He let his hands sink on the stone window-ledge, while with a vacant attention he watched the movements of the impudently chirping sparrows playing about the stone basin. And as he did so the thought occurred to him, in an idly speculative way, of how simple it would be to lean out of the window a little too far. The drop was close upon fifty feet, he judged, to the ground.

'It seems curiously easy to forestall fate,' he said, 'and shoot oneself into the hopper. I wonder people don't do it oftener. One can't help fancying one might find quiet so.'

To his imagination the idea of falling from some great height had always been strangely fascinating. He remembered how, when he had that brain fever as a boy, night after night he had felt himself compelled by some resistless power—he could give it neither shape nor name—to crawl out to the extreme edge of Saturn's luminous ring, and look over into illimitable space. And how, at least one night, one frightful—or was it blissful?—night, the power had pressed him harder than ever before. Had forced him out and out, had come close and grappled with him, had seized and flung him over headlong into the

bottomless gulf of space, of darkness, and of utter silence, save for the hiss of his own body rushing downward through the blank air.

He had not thought of the dream for years. Not since—not since the night of Jenny Parris' birthday party at Red Rock Mouth, when he had watched the drifting herring-boats from the rocky road leading up from Beera Quay. He recalled the whole scene as though it had been of yesterday. The black headland, the glistening pallor hanging in the west, the babble of the stream down the gulley mingling with the growling trample of the ground swell on the beach below; his groping for stones in the roadway, wherewith to prove the world was round; and the light in Jenny's bedroom window.

Jenny Parris.—Colthurst was filled to overflowing with bitterness. For he might rail at the universal economy and general constitution of things as loudly as he pleased; try at once to conceal the indignity of his present position, and assauge his disgust of it by fine phrases of pessimist philosophy; but it all came back to Jenny, and that which she stood for—the breach of a plain moral law—in the end. It was no relentless, fantastic circle of fate, no grinding of nether or any other mill-stones from which escape was impossible; it was just simply Jenny, and that which of necessity she brought him, and that which he—Colthurst admitted it—equally brought her, payment of the wages of a common sin.

Perhaps, admitting this, he should have cried 'quits,' and let the matter rest; but that was asking too much of his forbearance and sense of justice as

yet. The last payment she had made him was too recent, too insolent, too degrading, so it seemed to him. Just now he hated her. Hated her with the intensity with which we can alone hate that which compels us, in self-defence, to fall back on our lower nature. It was through the baser part of him she had tempted him years ago. It was in the baser part of him he had sought and found protection just now. Remembering his own cruel words hurled at the cowed, in a way, defenceless woman; remembering the odious little incident of the scattered stumps and crayons, Colthurst called himself a cad and a cur. But she had driven him to it; and what guarantee had he that she might not drive him to as bad or worse again? Here was a despair, low, immediate, practical, and therefore far more really searching and poignant, than any of the pompous, high-sounding ones he had so lately propounded.

And then leaning out of the window, looking down at the grey pavement, that drop of fifty feet presented itself in another aspect. So far he had treated it merely speculatively, for, at bottom, Colthurst despised suicide. It had always struck him as a lamentable confession of weakness and inadequacy; as a very crude fashion, at once stupid and showy, of cutting the knot. But now—for he reasoned it all out with that untempered lucidity, that unsparing logic, which is proof not of clearness of mind, but of a mind unhinged by nervous exhaustion, the terrible logic and lucidity of a sleepless night, when the vitality ebbs and imagination runs madly riot in the small hours before the dawn—now thinking of Jenny, and

the baseness to which she had pushed him and might push him again—(had not that old dream truth in it? Was it not the forecast of all this? Was not Jenny Parris and that which she symbolized the invisible power forcing him out and out to the edge of the luminous ring, one day to fling him over into the infinite of blank space?)—now suicide appeared not so much an act of defective moral courage, as of the finely-tempered courage which prefers martyrdom to apostasy. This seemed to him the final and permanent escape from Jenny, the final and complete payment of these same ugly wages of sin. But for her he would have died three years ago in the fly-blown garret of that *hôtel garni* in Paris. She had kept life in him at the sacrifice of what remained to her of good fame; thereby, making his life hers, in a sense, not his own. She had given his life back to him, but given it back polluted. And—the deluge was not after all an universal one, for sweet influences from out of his recent efforts at chivalry and noble conduct clung to Colthurst still—that pollution was to him unbearable, better washed off by the waters of the river of death even than not washed off at all. The selfish desire for mere rest was gone. It had given place to a distinct temptation; but the temptation can hardly be called an ignoble one as it presented itself to Colthurst in that moment of exaggerated feeling. He was tempted to lose his life, lose the life of the animal on the bare chance, the very remote chance—for it was no more after all to him—of saving that of the spiritual man.

'Yet, it seems hard,' he said, 'a trifle hard to be

called upon to throw everything overboard at three-and-thirty.'

He drew his right knee up on the window-ledge, and leaned out still farther, grasping the outer edge of the stone sill with both hands. It was characteristic of Colthurst's nature that even at this somewhat tremendous juncture the cool, calculating element in him asserted itself. He abhorred a bungle. He required to do things neatly. He wished now to assure himself that the height was sufficient, that no projection of doorway or window cornice would interfere to break the fall. He even wished the asphalt was less sloppy. It looked messy, unpleasant. He wondered, oddly enough, about the sparrows. When it happened, would they be frightened into seeking refuge upon the shiny slated roofs opposite? or would they only flit away a yard or two, and then flit back to peep and chatter, and inspect that which lay inert on the pavement with bright, inquistive, half-derisive little eyes?

Colthurst drew up the other knee, stood upright on the narrow sill, pressing the palms of his hands against the jamb of the window on either side. The bottom of the frame of the open sash was just on a level with his forehead. That was tiresome, cramping. He would have preferred a clear space, absence of all obstruction. And then, by a grotesque turn of fancy, the image of a conjuror's dog he had once seen jumping through red-covered hoops at a fair came to his mind—lowering its head, flattening itself out, laying its fore-paws together as it leapt.

For a moment he looked at the masses of sun-gilded

vapour trailing eastward; listened to the hoarse roar of the streets. A passion of regret for all that the earth has to show, which he would never see, for all life has to make known which he would never learn, came over him; for the ruin of his high hopes of artistic reformation; for the pictures haunting his brain, which he would never paint; for his fruitless love, the love he would never tell to the woman who had inspired it—a love still-born, destroyed before it had tasted the joy of existence. And then he thought of Dot—his own flesh and blood, as Jenny had said to him—poor, shrewd, naughty, bastard, little Dot. What would become of her? Would she go the same ugly way her mother had gone?

Clearly it would be wiser to make short work, to put a final and effectual stop to all this thinking.

Colthurst brought his heels togther upon the ledge, lifted his hands from the jambs of the window, placed them palm to palm, took a long breath, looked down; the height was giddy standing here.

Just then the sparrows started upward in hurried, jerky flight.

'Ah! they're flown!' he cried, involuntarily, out loud.

The sky above, the pavement below, the surrounding buildings, seemed to rock, to reel together in horrible, formless confusion. He had a sense of loss of balance, of slipping, of clutching at something, of a jar right through him, of a shatter of breaking glass, of moving figures, voices, laughter.

He believed that it was all over, that he had fallen; suffered a ghastly fear, too, since he still heard, saw,

thought, that though the body dies consciousness may remain. Then gradually he became aware that he was standing upon the landing once more; that he had tipped back in losing his balance, not forward; that he had clutched the bottom of the window-sash and pulled it down along with him, forcing his hands through a couple of panes of glass; aware that the doors of the medical school, at the far end of the quadrangle, were open, and that the students were trooping out; aware that Mary Crookenden's stately mulatto nurse, a flaring scarlet and gold handkerchief above her patient dusky face, was slowly ascending the steps leading to the art school entrance; aware that shuffling footsteps—Mr. Barwell's probably, the good man was going to take a look at the costume model still posing in the class-room there, and at the twenty young ladies still busily drawing her—were coming upstairs.

Colthurst was dazed and faint. Mechanically he dusted the grit from the window-ledge off the knees of his trousers; saw one hand was cut and bruised, wiped away the blood. As to his escape, he hardly took that in as yet. The feeling uppermost in his mind was one of dull self-mockery. It was pitifully ignominious to have gone so far and no further, to have taken so much trouble for nothing. He jeered at himself in sombre self-contempt; yet he was sensible of a need—the sight of the old coloured woman had stirred it in him—a need, whatever happened, to see Mary Crookenden once again.

Chapter VIII.

The injured-looking widow who presides over the ladies cloak-room had just retired, after informing Miss Crookenden that her servant was waiting for her. She belonged to that congenitally feeble order of persons who are perpetually guilty of small awkwardnesses; consequently the handle slipped through her fingers as she went, causing the door to slam loudly behind her. The sound echoed round the great room, and up to the domed roof. And as the clamour died away, Mary, standing before the easel sorting the anatomical plates she had been consulting and returning them to their red-covered portfolio, suddenly became aware of James Colthurst's presence, and of his rapid, whispering, hesitating accents as he addressed her.

'Are you g-going? M-must you go, Miss Crookenden? It is quite early yet.'

Mary set a high value on Mr. Colthurst's instruction; but just now she was tired. The atmosphere of the studios on this enervating spring day did not tend to the generation of an ardent thirst for labour. She was sorry to waste the chance of receiving an extra lesson, but she really wished to depart. Moreover, she had promised to drop in to tea with Miss Aldham on her way home. Lady Alice Winterbotham and Violet were to be there. And at this period Mary took a lively interest in Miss Winterbotham. She tried hard to like that very pretty and alert little lady very much indeed.

'Of course, it will end in her marrying Lance,' she

told herself, 'and I must be great friends with the dear boy's wife.'

Yet Mary had to admit the friendship did not spring up as rapidly and strongly as she could have desired. It was a plant, apparently, demanding a vast amount of cultivation. She really was very conscientious. She raked, and hoed, and watered and trained, and shone as sunnily in little compliments and attentions as she knew how upon the plant, with the result that Miss Winterbotham repeatedly declared her to be 'quite too dear and delightful for words.' Still something was lacking which should lie at the heart of friendship. Mary knew that. She hoped the fault was in herself. She wished—for subtle reasons, not wholly undiscoverable, I trust, to an acute reader—to entertain the highest possible opinion of Miss Winterbotham. She was most unwilling to recognise the minutest rift within the lute of the young girl's charms. And it was with the hope of convincing herself that Miss Winterbotham was really and after all riftless, completely sound, she was hurrying to Miss Aldham's small tea-party now. Her mind at this moment ran far more upon her cousin's possible bride than upon Mr. Colthurst and her own anatomical studies, and so her smile, as she turned to answer Colthurst, was slightly perfunctory, impersonal, a mere veiling of the wish to be left to her own devices.

'It is very good of you to come in to see my drawing,' she said, 'but, really, I'm afraid it is hardly worth showing you. I have been disgracefully lazy this afternoon. I am afraid I have done next to

nothing. I should much prefer your seeing it a day or two hence, when there is more to criticize.'

It is not easy to step gracefully from the banks of the river of death to the neatly-paved highway of ordinary light social intercourse. Colthurst's retina still retained a pretty vigorous impression of the rush and swirl of those dark waters. He could not succeed in making the transit with easy indifference. He demanded sympathy, comfort. None were to be got thus. To get them—so it seemed to him at least—he must compel this fair woman to leave the said neatly-paved highway upon which she evidently proposed to meet, and to pass him with no more than a civil bow, compel her to stand by his side on the banks of that awful, all-engulfing stream.

'I d-did not come to see your d-drawing, Miss Crookenden,' he said. 'I came t-to see you.'

Thanks to his excessive stammering, Mary did not gather the full significence of this announcement, but her attention was arrested by his manner. Her smile faded, giving place to a certain wondering and startled distress. To mental suffering—specially when inflicted by herself—our young lady has on one or two occasions, I fear, shown herself somewhat callous. Physical suffering, however, affected her very differently. Its appeal was immediate, her response equally immediate. Miss Crookenden, beneath her little airs and graces, her touch of coldness, of languor, her very real and not unadmirable pride, had retained much of the capacity of passionate pity which had made her, ten years ago, fling herself face downward among the heather in Slerracombe Deep

Park and cry her heart out over the death-squeak of a rabbit. And Colthurst just now bore undeniable marks of suffering upon him. His face was almost livid. It had a kind of ravaged look on it; it was seamed with hard lines. His narrow, unshadowed eyes were at once dull and wild. His habitual restlessness was accentuated. He could not keep still; he moved to and fro with the disquiet of exhaustion, like one tossing in fever. His usually upright and active, though heavy, figure was all slouched together. Miss Crookenden was only accustomed to behold her fellow-creatures in the well-groomed, full-fed, excellently finished condition common to civilised society. Colthurst's disordered appearance struck her, therefore, all the more forcibly. She had never seen any one look like this before.

'What has happened?' she asked. 'You are ill—you are in pain.'

Colthurst tried to answer that nothing had happened, nothing was the matter, but his stammer got altogether the better of him. At no time was it a noisy stammer; it was not noisy now, but it was persistent, absolute. Fight against it as he might, wrench at his shirt collar, put forth all the energy left in him to overcome it, he could not articulate an intelligent word.

Then, indeed, it did seem to him he had reached the nadir; that he was drinking the very dregs of the day's cup of humiliation. For this revolt on the part of his body, this refusal of obedience, this breaking of the natural connection between the material and mental parts of himself in his present overwrought,

highly nervous condition, was frightful. The city was divided against itself; his foes, in the most literal and practical sense of the phrase, were of his own household.

He flung himself down on the wooden bench running round outside the rail that pens off the space allotted to the model's platform. Spread out his hands with a gesture of despairing self-disgust, and looked up dumbly at Mary Crookenden?

And shall we think the less well of Miss Crookenden because in response to that look and gesture the snow melted somewhat? Because she ceased to consider the minor proprieties very carefully? Because she listened to the voice of her womanhood, rather than to the voice of conventional discretion? Because, in short, she behaved as a pure-minded person and not as a prude?

'Ah,' she said, gently, quickly, 'pray don't be so distressed. Wait a little; rest. Don't try to speak yet.'

She was strangely moved, willing to make concessions.

'Never mind my engagement. I can wait if you wish me to wait. And you do wish it, I think,' she said.

For all answer Colthurst held out his hand, still looking up. He was not dangerous, dominating, possessive, intrusive, just then. Genii, bear and cat alike were banished. The dæmonic element was in abeyance. Only the human creature was left—the human creature hunted, exhausted, utterly weary from the tearing of devils it had, after all, striven not ungal-

lantly to cast out—asking for a trifle of kindness, of sympathy, for the simple yet profound consolation which a friendly human touch alone can give.

For a just perceptible space Mary Crookenden hesitated. Then calmly, with a lift of her head, and a fine seriousness tempering the yielding gentleness of the action, she placed her hand in his. The sister of charity thinks it no shame to let the sick, pain-racked head rest if needs be upon her bosom. Mary, recognising the supreme claim of suffering, thought no shame either, as Colthurst's quick, deft fingers closed quietly, steadily, without emphasis or accentuation of pressure, upon hers. And so they waited, she standing, he sitting, looking gravely at one another, hand in hand.

The great red-walled room was still—the only witnesses of this scene, an anatomical figure exalted on its pedestal, a skeleton hanging meekly hideous from its little wooden gallows, not being companions of the talkative sort. While the atmosphere of it was rich with a warm diffused brightness, reflected down through the skylights from the surface of those masses of sun-gilded cloud still moving in slow procession across the pale clearness of the spring sky. The roar of the street was hushed here to little more than a drowsy hum of bees. Colthurst had prayed for repose. It was granted him—good measure pressed down and running over, for the next few minutes at least—Minutes which seemed to him an eternity in the depth of their healing peace. Minutes without past or future; plucked out of the heart of turmoil; sanctified, set apart. Minutes during which

the great millstone ceased grinding or seemed to cease. —Alas! perhaps it was mostly seeming; during which Time's hurrying feet were stayed; and the shadow standing at high noon on the face of the dial, paused, crept no further towards sun-setting and the night. Minutes during which the tormenting, tragic riddle of sex seemed solved; the baser part obliterated from it; appetite vanquished in the apprehension of a relation sweeter far than any earthly marriage—the maid retaining the completeness of her innocence, the man blessed, unvexed by the ache that comes alike of desire and of satiety. For the first time in his urgent, restless life Colthurst knew what it is to be content.

With Mary Crookenden, of necessity, the experience was different. She had given Colthurst her hand in purest pity, in the unreasoning instinct to soothe him—somehow, anyhow, as one soothes a suffering child or dumb beast, careless of the means so long as the end is gained. But as the minutes drew on in that strange, all-pervading quiet, the character of her sentiment changed. The snow melted, the stream ran faster, the channel widened, deepened, the current gained in volume and in force. That same rage of living, stilled for the time being in Colthurst, began to stir in Mary Crookenden;—passed into her, perhaps (my sense of probability is not greatly staggered by the supposition), through the steady clasp of his hand but stirred in her purer, more lawful, by as much as her mind was more unstained than his. Hints, vague as yet, and misty, half-seen shapes of what life, love, and the inexhaustibly various spectacle of this majestic world—of what these may be to

the elect, to those who have faith and courage enough to sing the 'Song of the Open Road,' began to dawn on her. Heretofore she had lived on, looked at, the surface chiefly. She had even affected a cynicism now and again—the cynicism of ignorance, of limitation of experience. Now she began, feebly as yet, doubtingly, wonderingly, to apprehend the soul which lies in all things, beyond the mere outward sense and seeming of them. She was awed and amazed. Her eyes lost their simplicity of pity, grew troubled, ceased to give. Began to question, to ask, and out of the treasure-house of her own awakening nature, to receive. For the man these few minutes held a baptism of water to the washing away of sin. For the woman they held a baptism of fire to the quickening of the spirit.

But because that same 'Song of the Open Road' cannot be sung without strain of brain and imagination, of moral and spiritual fibre, the novice masters but a line of it, hardly that often, at a time. The harmonies of it are too full and rich, the rhythm at once too subtle and too vast—flowing, like the flowing tide when the wind sweeps in behind it from the ocean, and the great grey-green rollers swing up and break, and break again, along the shouting beach. To Mary Crookenden the stress of stillness, and of the strong working of apprehension, became painful in its intensity. Mutely, almost timidly, as one who asks a favour rather than exercises a right, she made a motion to withdraw her hand. Colthurst let it go without any demonstration of farewell. The episode had been perfect. His taste revolted against marring

that perfection by the introduction of any commonplace, or sullying it by the most distant hint of flirtation or intrigue.

So he sat still, watching the girl as she went back to the easel, and recommenced the process of packing up her drawing things. The best was over. High noon was passed; the shadow broadened, and crept on again over the face of the dial, but the sun was some way from setting yet. For it was infinitely pleasant to sit thus and watch her, without apology in that pause of permitted silence. There are exquisitely constituted persons, whose smallest and most familiar actions are marked by a certain distinction. Mary Crookenden was among the number of these. Her movements were an admirable combination of decision and measured grace. Colthurst watched them with delight, but with a growing sense of regret. Soon she would have finished. Then she would speak or he must; and he feared any speech would of necessity go to break the charm, and reintroduce the conventional, social element. He counted the sticks of charcoal as Mary packed them away in her pencil case, wishing their number were larger and that thus the process might be lengthened out.

It so happened that the last stick but one snapped. The longer half of it fell on to the floor and rolled across almost to his feet. He stooped, picked it up, rose and went over to the easel. The girl's eyes were still grave, still troubled, and her face was slightly flushed; but she looked full at Colthurst, without a trace of self-consciousness as she took it from him.

'You are better?' she said.

'Thanks to you—yes.'

The charm was not broken after all. Colthurst gathered himself together. His old energy was reviving. There was much he longed to say to Miss Crookenden—now, while the charm was still upon them both. He spoke low, in rapidly uttered sentences, hesitating distressingly at first, almost giving way again, yet he spoke.

'It is u-useless to try to thank you,' he said. 'You have done more for me than you know—than I have any w-wish you should know.'

Mary was silent, but attentive, still unself-conscious.

'I have b-been in hell this afternoon,' Colthurst stammered. 'Not the theologians' hell, in which an utterly just and merciful Deity is reported to roast poor wretches everlastingly for slight errors of doctrine; b-but in one of the ordinary, every-day hells above ground, which we human beings display such elaborate ingenuity in preparing for ourselves and each other.'

Colthurst's words and his manner were curiously at variance. The former were harsh enough and to spare; the latter was quiet, gentle even. He smiled a little at Miss Crookenden as he spoke.

'Ah! depend upon it, that hell-making business is one we can quite be trusted to manage for ourselves,' he said. 'We need no supernatural intervention to perfect our work. Dante, with his stage machinery of ice, and fire, and pitchforks, is out of it. All the required effects can be p-produced at a far cheaper rate than that.'

He waited a moment, trying to keep himself in hand, trying to prevent breaking the charm, by any exaggeration of bitterness. Yet remembering Jenny, remembering the asphalt and the sparrows it was difficult. Bitterness surged up in him, all the fiercer, more acrid by contrast with his late realisation of content and peace.

'B-but I have no wish to treat you to an essay on the *Inferno,*' he said, presently. 'That would be a dreary sort of return to make you. I only want to express some of the gratitude I bear you. I thank you for leading me out of the *Inferno*—bringing me from the stifling darkness of the pit into the fresh air and light again.'

Mary made a gesture of repudiation.

'I know you don't understand—that makes no difference,' Colthurst went on. 'I had ten times rather you did not understand. B-but the fact remains. I was desperate, and you have reconciled me—mad, and you have made me sane again. You have worked a miracle of healing. I was consumed by self-contempt; you have been very gracious, very patient with me, and so in my own eyes I am no longer quite contemptible. Most people are chary of giving up life, have rather a superstitious reverence for their own existence. I don't share that superstition. To live, sometimes, is merely to perpetuate one's own disgrace.'—Again almost uncontrollable bitterness welled up in him. He had an access of stammering painful to witness.—'I felt that was p-pretty clearly the case with me just now. I am still a little doubtful whether my life is worth saving; but such as it is,

you have saved it. You have d-done more. Your purity has cleansed it, your pity, your kindness, for a while at all events, have wiped out my sense of disgrace.—You don't understand. As I tell you, that is of no consequence. There is a good deal a woman such as you had better never understand about a man like me.—I seem to be talking wildly. In saying all you have done for me, I seem to be claiming too much.'

Every human being who is more than a mere bundle of clothes labelled with a name, has his hours of effulgence, I suppose. Hours when the best possible of his moral and spiritual capacity makes itself felt. When the veil of flesh grows thin, and the unlovely accretions formed by habit, greed, sin, the false philosophies and false modesties which this foolish world has taught him, fall away from him, and the divine image in which at the beginning he was made, the divine type, to which in the end—as we believe—he will of necessity conform, stands plainly revealed, giving him for the time being a certain grandeur and splendour of bearing. Something of this strange splendour was visible in James Colthurst just now. He moved further away from the beautiful girl, carrying himself well and proudly, gazing at her with a worship in which there was no slavishness, yet no hint of offence.

'B-but I don't really claim much, b-believe me,' he said. 'F-for I love you. I l-love you, and I never expect, never hope, will never ask, God helping me, to come one step nearer you than I have come in the last half-hour.'

There was a silence of some duration. Colthurst broke it. He meant to say the whole of his say, but he did not care to look at Mary Crookenden as he said it. He stared down at the boarded floor.

'I know a good deal about love, more than is creditable, perhaps, or profitable. I have had a pretty full experience. I can gauge the quality of my own emotions very fairly accurately by now. I know which promise to be permanent, which are only evanescent.'—Colthurst raised his eyes to the girl's face again, the dignity had come back into his bearing. 'And the love I bear you is unlike that I have ever borne any other woman. I did not know a man could love as I love you. I thank you for teaching me the secret. It is superb—it—it is cruel. It strings up lax moral sinews as a red-hot iron strings up lax bodily sinews. It is a tremendous remedy, but it cures. Perhaps it also kills—I don't know about that, and I don't care.—P-pray do not imagine that I am making an appeal to you, Miss Crookenden, trying to work upon your feelings in an underhand sort of way. Understand I want nothing from you that most men want in return for their love. I want absolutely nothing, except this—to tell you that my love for you is there, established not to be shaken—there, definite, in full possession of me, always, waking and sleeping—never letting me go, holding me whether I like it or not. It has mastered me, driven out all possibility of lower, baser, easily gratified sorts of love. It reigns alone. And—and it is hopeless—hopeless. And'—he broke out passionately, the bit-

terness surging up resistless, uncontrollable at last—'may God in His mercy—if, indeed, there is a God—keep it hopeless, keep me intending, fully determined that it shall be hopeless; keep me feeling, as I feel now, that the worst of all conceivable anguish would be to snatch a happiness which might end in the scorching of your beautiful feet in the flames of my private hells.'

Mary Crookenden had gone back to the chair at her easel, and sat down. She put one hand over her eyes with a sort of shuddering sigh. She wanted to shut out the sight of Colthurst's ravaged face. She wanted to get momentary relief from her overpowering awareness of his strong, and, as it appeared to her, fateful presence. She felt as though she was losing her footing, stumbling blindly in regions unknown and abnormal. Her old, unreasoning panic fear of Colthurst began to reassert itself. Other men had professed love for her, as we know; but it was love of quite another pattern. Their vows and ardours had been frequently entertaining, frequently frankly tiresome. All, save Lancelot's—and Mary earnestly and persistently strove to deny the existence of any sentiment tenderer than legitimate cousinly devotion on the part of the goodly youth—all had been dipped in a certain social glaze, which had rendered the surface of them uniform and deprived it of any rough, arresting, adhering quality. Sir Theophilus O'Grady, it is true, had vowed he should blow out his small modicum of brains if the young lady refused the handsome offer of his hand and heart. But Mary failed to be greatly impressed

by these threats of self-destruction. She felt pretty secure he would think better of them by the time he had finished his dinner; and so, indeed, he did. The cartridges continued to repose innocuously in the respective chambers of his revolver until such time as he diverted himself by taking pot-shots out of window at certain amorous cats disporting themselves on the leads at the back of his rooms in St. James's Place. But this declaration of Colthurst's was altogether new, unique both in form and in the prospect it opened. It did not occur to Mary to doubt its truth. There was in it a ring of absolute sincerity. And that made it all the more startling, disquieting. The girl was nonplussed, her faculties paralysed by the strangeness of the position. She did not know what she felt; still less did she know what to say.

A considerable pause followed. Again Colthurst was the first to speak.

'Y-you are angry,' he said. 'I d-disgust you.

'Oh! no no, you don't disgust me. Why should you disgust me? But you bewilder me. You make me very sad,' Mary answered. She had grown pale again. She had much ado to control herself. Her lower lip trembled.

'I am sorry I m-make you sad,' Colthurst said, gently.

He had recovered himself, but it was difficult to him to keep quite still. He took an end of charcoal off the easel-tray, and began crumbling it absently between thumb and finger, watching the dry, brittle flakes as they floated downward in a small dusky cloud.

'And yet I don't know that I need be sorry,' he went on| 'Perhaps it will do you no harm to be a little sad, even for such an unworthy cause as me. The light natures can't stand sadness. It sours them, deprives them of the paltry use they might otherwise have had. Best leave them alone to fizzle out anyhow in an atmosphere of congenial frivolity. But the strong natures can stand it. It braces and enriches them. You are strong. And so you had better accept it without whimpering or shirking. In the end you must accept it, unless you voluntarily, of set purpose, condemn yourself to sterility, refuse to live to the full of your own capacities.'

Colthurst's fingers were still. He glanced up at her—a glance at once gentle and compelling.

'D-don't refuse,' he said. 'A-at your peril you refuse. Believe me all the noblest thought, noblest work, noblest friendship is rooted and grounded in profound sadness. Those divine few minutes you gave me just now, standing here, letting me hold your hand, were the direct outcome of sadness so searching, so undoing, that it nearly—well—we needn't dwell on it—but, as I told you, it nearly made me throw up the game.'

'Ah! that is too much. You make it all terrible,' Mary Crookenden cried, and the tears started hot and smarting into her eyes.

'I d-don't make it,' Colthurst stammered. 'It m-makes itself.'

He was silent for a little while, his fingers crumbling the charcoal again in their neatly violent way, the brittle flakes falling faster.

'I suppose you call yourself a Christian, Miss Crookenden?' he said, suddenly.

Mary bowed her head in assent.

'Well, then, it is obvious that you are bound to explain the universal riddle precisely by sadness, and nothing else. For the history of Christianity is about the saddest thing out, whether you hold the sublime old creed, which commands you to worship the founder of it as God—God betrayed, outraged, murdered, by the creatures of His own making who, with infinite compassion, He came down from heaven to save. Or whether you incline to the modern theory of the arrogant young Jew of genius, the dramatic character of whose trial and public execution generated a morbid sentiment which has deluded humanity for close on nineteen hundred years, and drenched both the Old World and the New in blood. Take it either way, I don't think sadness can go much farther than that. Sad!' Colthurst repeated, quietly, as the last of the little charcoal cloud sank on to the floor.—'Sad, everything's sad, fair things and foul things alike. Lies are sad. Truth just as sad—there's not a pin to choose between the two in that respect. And yet, somehow, I am sure I don't know why,' he added, smiling, looking at Mary Crookenden with a certain exaltation—'truth, which just now I take to mean virtue, purity, honesty—a fight to keep one's life from henceforth clean—truth is adorable, lies damnable, all the same.'

But even as he spoke, the charm was broken. And to him it seemed night came with a rush, the sun dropped like lead below the horizon, darkness cov-

ered the face of the dial. The cause was simple enough. Nothing more dire than the voice of the hall porter announcing:—

'A gentleman in the office, sir, to see you on business.'

While at the same moment the door high in the wall of the theatre creaked slightly as Adolphus Carr's well-preserved person presented itself upon the narrow balcony. If the air is highly charged with the magnetism of sentiment, you must be obtuse, indeed, if you have no suggestive twitches and tinglings on first inhaling it. Colthurst and Miss Crookenden were standing beside the young lady's easel in the centre of the large room; their attitudes were ordinary enough, still Mr. Carr received an impression that his advent was pre-eminently untimely, that it had arrested the completion of a somewhat moving drama. He suffered an instant of acute indecision. Then with laudable discretion he requested himself politely but firmly to ignore and indeed if possible obliterate the said impression. He raised his *pince-nez* and gazed, mildly attentive, at the anatomical figure, exalted, one skinless arm extended, upon its red pedestal.

In the brief interval Miss Crookenden's manner had become reserved to the point of frigidity. She lifted her drawing-board down off the easel, and took up her pencil-case, with deliberation. She wanted to go, but she, also, wanted her exit to be dignified, without any effect of haste. In passing she bowed to Colthurst. She did not propose to speak. But Mary was not altogether mistress of herself. As she

bowed she glanced at Colthurst, and a vague anxiety for him, a strange drawing towards him, half attraction, half alarm, impelled her after all to address him.

'You are better,' she said. 'You will not, you must not, throw up the game.'

The sun had set. But for Colthurst there was an after-glow, a flush of unlooked gladness and splendour.

'N-no,' he stammered, 'no, not just yet any way.—Putting an end to it all is a thing one can do any time, after all. I-it's among the things that will keep.'

Then he went to interview Mr. Carr in the office. Professor Sylvester, finding leisure profitable both to health and the painting of pictures, had sent in his resignation. The Council desired that Colthurst should be sounded. If it was offered him, would he undertake the permanent directorship of the Connop Trust School?

BOOK V.—TWO IDYLLS.

'L'amour est l'enfant de la Bohème.'

CHAPTER I.

THE victoria bowled along at a round pace. The horse had not been out of the stable much lately, and was lively in consequence. But Miss Crookenden's irreproachably appointed groom drove well, and the young lady herself was not troubled with nerves. Indeed, she found exhilaration in the sharp pace, shaving of wheels and corners, forging ahead through the thronging stream of traffic. Miss Crookenden wore what she was pleased to describe as the 'one tidy frock she had left'—the blue-grey, silver breast-plated garment with which we are already acquainted. Over it, she had on a little cut-away coat of the same colour, a rolled beaver collar to it, high-standing at the back. The wind had changed during the night. There was a point of north in it giving it a drying, invigorating quality—a sufficient edge of sharpness to justify the wearing of a trifle of fur, though April and spring were here.

Spring, indeed, was very sensibly here. London, like Miss Crookenden, had put on its tidy frock, which, like hers, was a sufficiently smart one. A certain indefinable go and swing was in the air, something of the vernal excitement which makes planets

sprout and blossom, birds sing and pair. London looked, as it can very much look at times, massively brilliant in a broad spread lustre of sunshine, under a sky continental in height and cloudless intensity of colour. Parliament met early that year, I remember, and there was a good deal of season before Easter. Most private houses were open, their window-gardens radiant with tulips and crocuses, an awning already put out here and there. In the parks and squares the chestnuts were breaking into flower, pyramids of pink and white bud standing bravely erect amid the tossing foliage; while a veil of fragile green was drawing over the heads of the sooty branched elms. Oh! palpably, visibly the Spirit of Spring was abroad, and that not in his coy, tender-hearted, tearful humour. To-day he was gay, glittering, tumultuous, a bit of a rake. His hat was tipped over his ear, and his eyes danced with expectation and mischief as his feet beat the London flags. He permitted himself to cast a gallant glance at every pretty woman he met. Finally he stepped into Miss Crookenden's victoria, and seated himself in the vacant place beside her; bade her drive dull care away, enjoy her own youth, wealth, and beauty, shake off a distrust and melancholy which haunted her, and find life glad, diverting, sweet once more.

Mary had not gone to the Connop School this morning. The very thought of the place made her cheeks burn, made her stiffen with pride—or was it modesty? —made her shrink away, try not to remember, not to see and hear a scene and words imprinted upon her mind with extreme clearness. The law of reaction

was in full operation. It sent her *volte face* in the other direction. And this,—by the operation of another law, that of contraries,—all the more hastily, urgently, because a strange attraction drew her thoughts back again and again to the very scene and words from which she shrank. This sounds paradoxical. But paradox is king, if you look close enough over most human hearts and over the bulk of human conduct likewise. Specially does he reign supreme in the thoughts, actions, affections of that endlessly interesting and somewhat abnormal product of our nineteenth century civilization the—modern girl. So, in obedience to the cross working of these laws, in obedience to the mandate of King Paradox, instead of being at the Connop Trust School by ten a. m., arrayed in workmanlike garments, Mary, accompanied by Mrs. Chloe, had walked to Little and Randeggar's in Sloane Street; and there, after much deliberation over rival sumptuousnesses 'in the piece,' had selected a dove-coloured brocade with knots of pale pink and amber roses scattered over it, which unquestionably would make up into a divinely lovely tea-gown. Subsequently she had spent an interesting hour with her dressmaker discussing the important question of spring toilettes. Just by the way, going out and coming back, she had bought a number of engaging odds and ends, which she didn't particularly want; but which looked so seductive behind the plate-glass of the shop windows that it seemed an almost reprehensible waste of opportunity not to transfer them to the arms or pockets of the statuesque mulatto woman.

Now she had sallied forth to pay a round of rather neglected visits. Madame Jacobini was *hors de combat,* prostrated by headache, hence there was a vacant place upon the dark-blue cushions of the victoria whereon the Spirit of Spring could merrily, audaciously seat himself.

Spring did his best; he chattered away plausibly, glibly, and, I must add, common-sensibly enough, in his bright, caressing, flattering fashion. His talk brought an eagerness into the girl's face. He appeased her taste, her fancy, the softer, weaker side of her with the contemplation of a thousand agreeable trivialities. He called her attention to all that was rich, spacious, luxurious, imposing—and of that the West End of London, you may be sure, presented full harvest on this delightful day. He obliged her to think of yesterday too, and his accent had a ring of worldly-wise mockery in it. He used the words melodramatic, hysterical. Yes, Spring did his best. He tried cajolery, he tried laughter, he tried appeals to the inherent attraction of pomp and circumstance, of light-hearted pleasure, of impressive display. And yet, though Mary listened willingly, ready enough to be convinced if that might be, another voice continued to mingle with his. Hesitating, broken utterances, struck in harshly across his honeyed phrases and light philosophy of life,—'You are strong, and so you had better accept it without whimpering or shirking; in the end you must accept it unless you voluntarily, of set purpose, condemn yourself to sterility.'

There,—it was a positive relief when the carriage

drew up before the Winterbothams' house in Richmond Terrace, Whitehall Place, and the opposing voices were silenced for a while. So far every one on whom she had called had been out. Now her ladyship was out, but Miss Winterbotham was at home. Very well, then, she would see Miss Violet. Being late, Mary had missed her yesterday at Miss Aldham's. It might prove just as well to see her alone thus. Perhaps in a *tete-a-tete* that same stunted flower of friendship might be induced to bud and blossom.

Miss Violet was—is still, I believe, though she has long ceased to bear her maiden name—an exceedingly pretty little person. A certain infantine roundness, downiness, dainty warmth about her suggesting a delicious combination of a dormouse and a ripe cherry. Her eyes alone did not quite please Miss Crookenden. For the latter had, or imagined she had, more than once surprised a singularly wide-awake and mature glance under those softly fringed eyelids, a glance implying possibilities.

To-day, however, no possibilities inconsistent with innocent playfulness of dormouse or sweetness of ripe cherry obtruded indication of themselves.

The young girl was enthusiastic in her greeting, kissed her guest affectionately on both cheeks, and declared—it was quite too charming for words of her to have come in though Mamma was out. They had both been fearfully disappointed at not seeing her yesterday. It was really ages, perfect centuries, since she—the speaker—'had seen her. And she had perfect oceans to say. Had Mary heard of the great

excitement? Victoria Barking's engagement to Lord Sokeington? Everybody said he was just as nice as nice could be, and that Pentstock is the most enchanting old place. They were to be married directly after Easter. And Victoria looked quite too blissful for words, she was quite off her head about him. And of course she was utterly absorbed in her trousseau. What did Mary thing about trousseau linen? She'd been with Victoria to a whole host of places this morning looking at things; and that was why she was at home now. She had come in regularly fagged out. Choosing trousseau things was so wearing, you know. Did Mary like lawn, or batiste, or silk best? Victoria inclined to silk. Of course it was rather the thing to have it now; and really some of the little silk shifties and night-i-gowns were simply too trottie for words. They made her'—the speaker—'just a little tiny bit envious. It would be so awfully interesting to be getting them for oneself, you know. And it must be so delightful to have one so utterly devoted to you as Victoria said Sokeington was. To be The One—you know. He'd given her the most lovely sapphires and pearls—a necklace and pendant. Victoria believed they cost between eight hundred and a thousand. But Mamma thought not as much as that. Sapphires are rather down this year. For her own part, she'—Miss Violet—'preferred diamonds.'

The young lady, it may be observed, in passing, carefully ignored the second vowel and concluding *d*.

'They were more useful on the whole. But then Victoria had got all her poor mother's diamonds, you

see, so she could do very well for the present. Of course all the Barkings were off their heads about the marriage, though they really hadn't worked it the least. It wasn't in the least a put up job. That was the charming part of it. Victoria declared she never was more surprised in her life than when he came to the point, though of course it had been a good deal talked about. He proposed, going down to Sandown, on the top of Mr. Abel Barking's drag. Victoria though they both got through it splendidly, for it was difficult to do it just in the way of ordinary conversation, don't you know, without anybody making out what was going on. She'—Violet—'was sure she should never have nerve to settle that sort of thing casually on the top of a drag. Because after all it must make you rather hot—didn't Mary think so? Supposing she was choosing, where did Mary think it would be nicest to be proposed to?'

Thereupon the hesitating, whispering voice broke in across Miss Winterbotham's high treble, while the brightly furnished drawing-room turned into a great bare, red-walled place.—'I love you, and my love is hopeless, and God in His mercy keep me knowing, determined that it shall be hopeless.'

Ah! stammering tongue, for pity's sake be still, don't trouble us. What have we to do with sorrow, catastrophe, with 'loves that never find their earthly close' now in pairing time, while Spring wears his hat so jauntily tipped upon his ear? Be silent, leave us undisturbed to think in peace about matters of real weight and moment,—such, for instance, as Victoria Barking's sapphires and silk chemises.

'Of course, there are the bridesmaids' frocks to settle about,' the young lady continued. 'They're fearfully interesting. And Victoria wants to strike out a new line which makes settling all the more wearing. They will have to be settled about at once, because I must try mine on before we go. You know we're going to Slerracombe for the Easter recess? It was quite too kind and delightful of Mrs. Crookenden to ask us. At first there were fearful agitations, because papa had half promised we would go down to Layton to the Denisons'. But we made him get out of it somehow, though he was rather worried. The poor dear old Denisons are quite too fussing for words when one stays with them. He's always pounding away at something that wants reforming, you know. And it's fearfully boring always to be talking about things that want reforming, don't you think so? And then I've been simply expiring to see Slerracombe for years. Everybody says it's quite too quaint and delightful—so by itself, and unlike any other place. And that Mr. Crookenden is really quite the best host in the world—so good-natured and always doing nice things for people.'

'Yes, Lancelot is always doing something dear and kind,' Mary said.

'He must be the most delightful cousin,' Miss Winterbotham returned. 'Only'—here Mary fancied she surprised a glance not wholly infantine or unsophisticated from under the pretty, fringed eyelids —'only perhaps it is rather a waste having such delightful people for one's cousins. Of course you're going down there, darling, for Easter?'

Miss Crookenden shook her head and laughed a little.

'Oh! I don't know,' she answered. 'I wait on circumstances. My plans are rather distractingly *en l'air* every way, just at present.'

Miss Winterbotham confounded herself in regrets. Her regrets, indeed, were great almost to the point of incoherence. It shortly appeared that meeting Mary was the central aim and object of the visit to Slerracombe; notwithstanding which Miss Crookenden rose to depart. The ceremony of the double embrace was repeated. Violet accompanied her guest to the head of the stairs, stood there smiling, dimpling, the softest of dormice, the ripest of cherries.

'Good-bye, darling,' she cried. 'I shall live in hopes. I shall be quite too disappointed for words if you don't turn up. I shall tell Victoria you vote for lawn. And your taste is always so simply perfect I am sure she'll be glad to have your opinion. Look in again soon. It's too charming to have seen you,' and Miss Winterbotham kissed her finger-tips with the most captivating air of affection.

Out into the movement of the bright street again, the brown horse all the gayer for the waiting.

—'The light natures can't stand sadness. Best leave them alone to fizzle out anyhow in an atmosphere of congenial frivolity. But the strong natures can stand it. It braces and enriches them. You are strong—'

'No, no, indeed, I'm not strong,' pleaded Mary Crookenden. 'I don't want to be embraced and enriched. Where's the good of it? I want to enjoy myself. I want to be happy.'

Up Whitehall, through Cockspur Street, across Waterloo Place, into Pall Mall, a dazzle of sunshine in her eyes. But notwithstanding the dazzle she presently saw something which made her order the carriage to cut diagonally across the on-coming stream,—whereupon the driver of a hansom shouted at her groom, while the foam from his horse's bit bespattered the sleeve of her jacket as he dragged it aside and back on its haunches. Mary, however, was not apologetic. She leaned forward smiling, beckoning as the victoria drew up against the kerb. More than one person observing the young lady's attitude, glanced round to discover who might provoke so flattering a welcome; and passed on again with the sense of having seen a pleasant sight.

For I think the fine old word *debonair* most fitly describes Lancelot Crookenden as he made his way along Pall Mall in the sunshine that April afternoon. His countenance wore an expression of unruffled serenity, which, I hasten to add, was not in the least fatuous. It was too honest, too unostentatious for that. The well-bred young Englishman certainly possesses a happy gift of being smart without being showy. Upon Lancelot, from crown of hat to boot-sole, was neither spot, blemish, wrinkle, nor any such thing. Yet his raiment was as devoid of side as his bearing. It had no offensive newness about it. It was the result of himself, not of his tailor. He bore not the smallest resemblance to a walking advertisement. His clothes were all right—that was all. He himself was all right, likewise—sound, wholesome, in mind and body. Debonair, good to look upon.

'Why, I say, Polly, how awfully lucky to run across you like this.'

A light came into his quiet eyes, a glow into his smooth, handsome face, as he stood at the edge of the pavement and contemplated Miss Crookenden.

'You've cut that beastly old drawing school for once, then.'

'Yes, I've cut the beastly old drawing school, as you gracefully put it, for once,' she answered.

Violet Winterbotham was quite right. He really was a delightful possession in the way of a cousin. Delightful to the point of waste? Well, perhaps that was a question.

'I wanted a little change of ideas. I am taking a whole holiday.'

'And it's an awfully jolly day for a holiday,' Lancelot said, still contemplating her, still quietly glowing.

'Yes, oh! no doubt it is. I had no notion you were here, Lance.'

'Well, I only came up last night with Calmady. It was rather a sudden thing. He had to come on business, and Lady Calmady could not come with him. She was booked to go up to Scotland to her own people. And I thought she'd be easier if I was on hand, in case he wanted anybody, you know.'

'You are very considerate of Lady Calmady's comfort,' Mary observed; 'but where are you bound for now?'

'Oh! nowhere in partcular. I was only fooling about till I thought you'd be home. I meant to look

in at tea-time. I thought Madame Jacobini wouldn't mind—she'd let me wait till you came.'

Mary looked away for a moment at the string of passing carriages, bowed to Mr. Quayle coming down the steps of his club, there across the street; then—was it in obedience to some whispered suggestion on the part of that mischievous young rake, the Spring?—she swept her rustling blue-grey and silver skirts over to the further side of the victoria, and laid her hand invitingly on the vacant seat.

'Get in, Lance,' she said. 'You shall come back to tea all the same, if you like; but meanwhile let us fool about together.'

Miss Crookenden smiled very charmingly.

'Fooling alone doesn't amount to much, after all, and I am in the humour for most excellent fooling. Come along, get in.'

'Really?' he asked, slightly incredulous of such good fortune.

'Really and truly—that is, if you care to.'

'Why, of course I care to, Polly,' the young man said.

'But, then, where shall we go? The Park bores you.'

'Well, that rather depends,' Lancelot answered, while he arranged his long legs. 'I don't fancy it will bore me very much this afternoon, somehow.'

Miss Crookenden's eyes treated him to a lingering survey as they sped away up the shady side of St. James's Street. Would Violet Winterbotham make him happy? Mary hoped, almost prayed, that she might. He deserved to be happy—comfortable, rea-

sonable, modest-natured being that he was. But do the modest natures always get their deserts? Mary caught herself sighing.

Just then they turned into the stir and turmoil of Piccadilly, the long perspective of it stretching out bright ahead; currents of close-packed traffic setting steadily east and west, cabs and carriages showing black against the powdery drab of the roadway, wheel-spokes and panels giving off zig-zags of whiteness in the sunlight; the trample of innumerable hoofs; once a slip and slither, which made Mary turn her head and bite her lip—a crash, a crowd rising up mushroom-like, amazingly immediate, a horse down on its side; omnibuses, laden within and without, towering elephantine amid the press of smaller vehicles; the pavements alive, too, thick and dark, with foot passengers; boys yelling evening papers. Here, breaking the seemingly endless line of house-fronts on the right, a hoarding, a patchwork of many-coloured posters—sauces, tobaccos, Nestle's Food, full-length portrait of Tottie Vale as Mark Anthony in 'Cleopatra Redressed,' jostling announcements of Second Advent meetings at Exeter Hall—alas! poor Tottie, one fears your occupation will be gone with disconcerting completeness whenever that last event takes place:—Above the hoarding masts and spars of scaffolding, rising up against the blue; then a block, the currents momentarily arrested, swerving apart on either side a queer little mid-street encampment—tarpaulin tent, piled wood blocks, brazier full of fiery eyes before and behind, pale flames leaping off, vanishing in the sunshine amid a swirl of oily

vapour, execrable stench of boiling pitch. On the left the Green Park, genuinely green for once, its lawns fresh with springing grass-blades, an azure haze hanging above them in the distance, beneath the avenues of small black-limbed trees.

All this, and much more, Mary Crookenden caught in passing, quick, vivid impressions—to her all the more vivid for that long period of work, of concentrated effort at the Connop School—all weaving themselves in with, quaintly crossing and illustrating certain thoughts which filled her mind, and fought out a sort of triangular duel there. Thoughts of yesterday, and Colthurst, and all that he stood for; of half an hour ago and Violet Winterbotham, and the radically different all which she stood for; of now and Lancelot, and that which he stood for. For how much did he stand? Mary was uncertain—I think, unfortunately. But there was something very soothing, undeniably comfortable, largely protective in his presence, as he leaned back lazily against the dark-blue cushions beside her amid the rush and clamour of the great, brilliant street.

'Lance,' she said, suddenly, as they bore away to the left, round the paviors' encampment, 'you are a splendid sheet-anchor. Virtue goes out of you; you make everything so delightfully probable and unperplexed.'

Lancelot regarded her with a sort of tender amusement. Polly's talk was frequently a little out of his depth. On the present occasion he did not attach any very definite meaning to her words, but they had a pleasant sound; they conveyed to him the assurance

that she didn't find him bad to be with on the whole. And, thereupon, to Lancelot the black-bodied victoria turned into I know not what all of an enchanted love-chariot; the brown horse, his knees up to his nose, and his chest all flecked with froth, into a flight of Venus' doves; the dapper groom into Dan Cupid himself. Ah! Spring and pairing time, what tricks you play, even the most reasonable and modest among us.

'I wonder you haven't more swagger,' the girl went on, in her sweet, grave voice, 'considering how uncommonly good-looking you are.'

'Why, Polly, surely you don't like swagger,' he said, getting rather red and, not unadroitly, begging the question.

'I am not sure. I can't quite make up my mind. I am inclined to believe every woman likes swagger in her heart of hearts. You see if you men have a fine effect of believing in yourselves it helps us to believe in you. And we are infinitely obliged to you for any little helps in that direction, since, even now, as things go you are practically our masters.'

The enchanted chariot turned into the Park. Venus' doves, checked by Dan Cupid, flew slower. For the fine day had brought out not only many dowagers to sun themselves into semblance of life and gaiety like torpid, last year's flies, but all the world and his wife, and his proverbial seven daughters. The riders were numerous, the string of carriages interminable. A few courageous persons even had sprinkled themselves over the ranges of chairs facing the Row, sparse, rather uncertain as to the

wisdom of their own action, like the sparse, fragile leaves sprinkled over the trees behind them.

'But if one's going to swagger one must have something to swagger about, don't you know, Polly?' Lancelot said. He wished the conversation would run in shallower and less bewilderingly personal channels.

'You have plenty, at least you have what most people would consider plenty.—There's old Lady Combmartin glaring at us out of her yellow coach. Bow to her.'

Miss Crookenden herself bowed, smiling brightly. I am afraid she took a naughty pleasure in encountering that venerable lady under existing circumstances. It increased the excellence of the fooling.

'She is shocked. Goodness me, how shocked she is,' she said to herself. 'She will make poor Lady Dorothy write yards to Aunt Caroline about it. Oh! well, let her. *Enfin, il faut payer pour tout.*—To begin with, Lance, in respect of swagger, I mean, there are your uncommon good looks.'

'Oh! I don't know anything about that,' he answered, still rather red. 'You're glad to have your proper complement of arms and legs, of course. But the rest seems to me rather frills for a man, it doesn't matter one way or the other. Hornidge doesn't drive badly,' he added, looking at the groom's neat back. 'You're satisfied with him? He's steady?'

'Perfectly, as far as I know.'

'He seems to me a decent sort of fellow. It's wonderful how well these boys out of the Brockhurst stable do turn out,' Lancelot went on, relieved at

having hit on a less embarrassing subject of conversation. 'It's all thanks to Lady Calmady. It's wonderful what an influence she has over them.'

Mary's blue eyes sounded the depths of his brown ones for a moment.

'You are very devoted to Lady Calmady,' she said.

'Yes, I am awfully fond of her.' The brown eyes were quiet, absolutely candid. 'Taken all round, she's about—well, I don't know how to put it—it sounds a little like spreading oneself, to say it, somehow; but I think she's just everything one wants a woman to be.'

Mary Crookenden was silent. She turned her graceful head away, glanced at the flower-beds glowing with scarlet and yellow tulips, glanced at the people on the footway. There was Anthony Hammond. He was unmistakable; his coats were getting to crease suggestively round the waist. He was in attendance on Miss White, the player of the banjo, and her mother. How the little American's full silken skirts fluttered as she faced up against the wind!

'I believe I am jealous of Lady Calmady,' Mary said presently. 'And I was envious of her already.'

'Jealous, envious? What do you mean, Polly?' exclaimed Lancelot.

'Yes, I certainly am jealous. You are there so much. And you admire her quite provokingly much.'

Lancelot laughed. He really could not help it. The idea of Polly being jealous on his account was too deliciously absurd. Then he became slightly solicitous. Surely she could not misunderstand how matters stood?

'I like being there because Calmady and she are so awfully happy together,' he said gently, almost reverently. 'I don't mean they make a parade of caring for each other. But you can't help knowing how they do care. You feel it's there, you see, going on all the time. And, well, somehow it seems to do you good.'

'Precisely. And that is what makes me envious. Lady Calmady made a tremendous venture, in the face of criticism—'

'I suppose it was rather a venture,' Lancelot put in reflectively, 'Calmady being so crippled as he is, poor dear fellow. But then Calmady's Calmady. He is worth risking a good deal for. Any way it's all turned out splendidly.'

'Yes, it is easy to be wise after the event. But she could not be sure it would turn out splendidly, She acted in fath. I envy the woman who has courage enough to trust her own judgment, whatever people say, and to make such a venture. It is fine. I should never have courage enough!'

Miss Crookenden's grave voice had a certain ring in it. Lancelot did not know what she might be thinking of, did not see how Lady Calmady's case bore upon her own. But he has an instinct that she was dissatisfied with herself, that she would like encouragement. There was a fund of generosity in this simple young gentleman. Regardless of self, he gave encouragement.

'Oh! you'd find you had courage fast enough, Polly, if you cared,' he said, smiling at her.

'But how is one to know when one cares?' Mary

rejoined. She turned away and nodded over the back of the carriage to Anthony Hammond and his ladies as she spoke.

Lancelot glanced at the delicate contour of her cheek, the soft outstanding of shadowed blonde hair under the upturned edge of her blue-grey and silver bonnet, the easy grace of her blue-grey and silver-clad figure. Then he fixed his eyes steadily, resolutely upon Hornidge, the groom. The outward aspects of his cousin were only too seductive. Lancelot was well aware of that. He tried not to think about them. To his mind there was a touch of unworthiness, a wanting in the perfection of respect in thinking about them. To him Polly was sacred; and, by a turn of feeling which I own appears to me fine rather than foolish, he therefore reckoned it little short of profane to suffer himself to dwell on the spectacle of her beauty.

'Oh! I don't think it's so very difficult to know whether one cares or not, when one does care,' he said quietly.

But now, fortunately perhaps, for our young people's talk was unquestionably drifting into dangerously sentimental waters, as the carriage turned northward, skirting the railings of Kensington Gardens, who should cross them but Lady Louisa Barking driving her celebrated pair of cobs. Her sister, Lady Alicia Winterbotham, moreover, was with her. The meeting, recognition, acknowledgment on both sides of such recognition was necessarily of the briefest, for the cobs trotted fast and Dan Cupid, escaped from the string, let the doves have their pleasure again as to pace. The meeting occupied but an in-

stant. But in an instant, oh! dear me, how much can be conveyed when there is the intention to convey it! The daughters of the noble house of Fallowfeild disapproved highly; and they contrived very effectually to let Miss Crookenden know as much. Their well-bred countenances, the set of their small and remarkably well-shaped mouths—all the Quayles are wonderfully alike—intimated in the clearest possible manner that, in their opinion, unless the situation was explained by subsequent events—which Heaven forbid, for what then became of Violet's neatly planned little future?—Miss Crookenden was guilty of a startling indiscretion, of a grave disregard of social good taste, in thus driving about all alone, right in the world's eye, as you may say, with that very eligible youth, her cousin.

And Mary, after a movement of righteous anger—for what anger is not righteous first off in the estimate of the enraged one?—at the impertinence of this adverse criticism, was seized with compunction. Her fooling ceased abruptly to have any quality of excellence in it. Was this the way to promote Lancelot's peace of mind, and push him into Miss Winterbotham's pretty, wide-open arms? She knew it was not. She feared it was culpably thoughtless, if not positively heartless. As our wilful young lady gazed silently at the pleasant sunshiny scene,—the riders, walkers, carriages, the wide road and white bridge spanning the gleaming water of the Serpentine just ahead, the rise of green sward beyond the Powder Magazine dotted with heavy-fleeced sheep, the azure haze, pale repetition of the blue sky above, which

overlaid the distance,—trees, houses, vistas between the big elms on the left in Kensington Gardens, with a soft uniformity of tint,—she became a trifle ashamed of herself. With haste, ill-considered haste as it proved in the upshot, she tried to rectify her mistake, to retrieve the position.

'I was coming away from the Winterbothams when I met you,' she said. 'I am so glad they are going to you for Easter. Violet was radiant. It suits her to be radiant. She really looked quite delicious. I hope you like her, Lance?'

Lancelot had quite recovered his serenity. The look of tender amusement had come back. Mary found that look embarrassing, somehow.

'Oh! yes, I like her well enough. She's a very nice girl as girls go. My mother wrote and told me she'd asked them. But I am afraid I had almost forgotten about it.'

'Don't forget,' Mary said. 'You had much better remember. I am delighted you are going to have them.'

'Are you, Polly? Why?'

Now this really, if you like, was embarrassing. Mary took her courage in both hands.

'Because I want you to like Violet a little extra-much. It would be such a comfort, Lance, such a real comfort to know you found her a great deal nicer than other girls, as girls go.'

Mary's eyes sounded the depths of these honest brown ones again.

'I should be glad to know that,' she said. 'Very

glad, indeed. Dear Lance, I am very fond of you, you see. I so want you to be happy.'

For a minute or two only the light crunch of the carriage wheels, and thud of the horses' hoofs on the smooth gravel of the road, voices floating up clear and shrill from a company of children sailing toy-boats near the Receiving House of the Humane Society, the excited barking of a dog for whom sticks were being thrown into the gleaming water. Then Lancelot said slowly:—

'Well, you know, Polly, if you want me to be happy, it's easy——'

'Oh! Lance, dear old boy, don't say anything foolish,' Mary broke in hurriedly, imploringly.

She perceived the woful futility of her bit of diplomacy. It had been ill-calculated indeed. It had precipitated the crisis instead of warding it off. She went very hot. The remembrance of Victoria and Lord Sokeington's little affair on the top of that drag of Mr. Abel Barking's intruded itself in the most provoking manner. She desired, genuinely, actively desired, now that it was rather late for such desires, to spare the goodly youth pain.

'Dearest Lance, pray, pray hold your dear tongue. Pray don't say anything foolish. I can't forgive myself for having asked you to drive with me, like this. It was selfish, it was stupid. I shall reproach myself so horribly if you say something foolish.'

'There's nothing to reproach yourself for—nothing in the world,' he answered. 'You've given me an unexpected good time this afternoon, that's all. And

I'm not going to say anything foolish—any way it doesn't seem a little bit foolish to me.'

Again the hoof-strokes, the soft crunch of the wheels as the enchanted chariot rolls onward over the sunny bridge, the yapping of the dog, the children's clear voices. Then, his head held high, his smooth young face rather pale, a tremor about his lips, with a sort of gentle desperation, Lancelot asked her:—

'Polly, will you have me?'

Chapter II.

As has already been stated, Madame Jacobini had a headache. But, her habitual vivacity notwithstanding Madame Jacobini also had her pieties. And to-day, if her head had been at its soundest, she would still have remained at home and refused herself to visitors. For this was the anniversary of Signor Jacobini's death. Nine years ago to-day that irascible musician had taken leave of a state of existence with which he had proved himself singularly incapable of coping successfully, and had entered upon that other one in which—I say it with all reverence—one hopes things may be a little less mixed.

For that radical mixedness of things here below had contributed largely to the poor Signor's undoing. His was one of the lop-sided erratic natures which give such an infinitude of trouble to themselves and everybody who cares for them. He belonged to the unlucky order of persons who possess the temperament of genius without possessing any sufficient prac-

tical talent to act as safety-valve and carry off the alarming rush of steam genius is continually in process of generating. Such persons are worthy of all commiseration. In the abstract one regards them with the tenderest pity. In the concrete one too frequently finds them insupportable.

Signor Jacobini was wedded to his art; but I cannot pretend to say the marriage was a happy one. Music was to him a seventh heaven, being caught up into which he heard and saw things unspeakable. Yet, of course, he wanted to speak them. What artist does not? During the period of inception he was ravished with ecstasy—filled with a divine fury. During the period of execution, or attempted execution, he was usually filled with a fury of quite another kind. Alas! his compositions were not even second-rate—second-rate, I mean, among the modest English musical efforts of the day. Poor little things, I am not so cruel as to judge them by any universally obtaining standard; that would indeed be to sink them in the mud.—And, having a measure of clear-sightedness in him, long before the celestial message was set down on the music score, Signor Jacobini had begun to make this lamentable discovery for himself; he became conscious that, ecstasy notwithstanding, he was in the act of producing anything but an immortal work. And then he became anything but good company. He fell upon himself. He tore himself to pieces. And, as so often happens in such cases, he involuntarily extended the area of tearing. It began with himself, it went on to his dearest, be-

cause his nearest. Madame Jacobini was severely torn too.

But to-day, as she lay back against the piled-up pillows on a sofa in Miss Crookenden's pretty drawing-room—screening her eyes with a fan, alike from the clear fire burning on the tiled hearth, and from the sunlight slanting in through the lace curtains of the further room and chequering the white panelling and the space of elaborately patterned pale apricot-coloured silk damask on the wall above—it was not of these unamiable tearings that Sara Jacobini thought. Four days out of five the poor Signor had been ill to live with; and so his widow just missed out the four, and bade memory dwell only on the fifth, when he had been repentant of ill-temper, child-like, merry with the jovial inconsequent mirth which was commoner a quarter of a century or more ago, I think, than it is in our tiresomely wise and wide-awake to-day. She recalled his witty speeches, his practical jokes, his inimitable gift of mimicry, his inexhaustible fund of anecdote. Oh! decidedly, it seemed to her in looking back on those fifth days, that on them poor dear Jacobini had been capital good company. She had taken him for better and for worse. Now she elected only to remember the better. Not that she took any merit to herself for this. She was spontaneously loyal. At the time she had not made capital out of her domestic infelicities, and required admiration for cheerful endurance of them. Madame Jacobini belonged to a social period and social stratum in which what I may call the theory of the husband and the comparative anatomy of the

honourable estate were not discussed by wives, affectionate or otherwise, with the unsuperstitious freedom customary at present. And she was certainly not going to make capital out of those infelicities now. That would have appeared to her a most ungracious waste of time and energy. Madame Jacobini had no capacity for nursing grudges. She let the dead bury their dead, with all possible despatch, in regard of what was disagreeable. And so it was the brighter aspects—the entertaining, whimsical, pathetic episodes—of her twenty years' experience of married life which held her memory. She pondered these things in her heart as she rested there alone and headachy in the charming white and apricot-coloured room, the atmosphere of it fragrant from the scent of violets and the delicate odour of greenhouse-grown roses—pondered them with liftings of the eyebrows, brief ejaculations, humorous little grimaces, though now and again her eyes filled. Ah! depend upon it, the grass grows none the less fresh and green upon the graves of those we have loved for being warmed by a sunshine of kindly laughter as well as watered by tears.

So Madame Jacobini leant against the pillows and remembered, while the chequered shadow cast by the lace curtains slipped across the damask and panelling nearer to the window. Yes, looking back was sweet on the whole, not bitter. The earthly relation had closed in tenderness; the final scenes, though played out amid poverty and failure, had been peaceful. She had sailed her marriage-ship over troubled waters, and had brought it safely into port at last.

And she sighed with a certain movement of gratitude thinking of that.

And then her thoughts passed from the accomplished voyage of her own marriage-ship to other possible hymeneal sailings. She looked forward. She questioned herself as to Mary Crookenden. Frankly, she was not satisfied about the girl. She watched her closely, and it seemed to her that she detected an increasing restlessness—moodiness almost—in her. Mary was reticent. But straws show which way the wind blows. Madame Jacobini was a great observer of straws. The straws gave conflicting evidence in the present case. She was puzzled.

'Her staying at home to-day, after months of early breakfasts, and unheard-of application and diligence'—Madame Jacobini let her fan drop on to her lap—'I do not fathom it. I cannot divest my mind of the notion that the tame Tartar counts for something in the business.'

She unfurled the fan, and again let it drop together with a little rattle.

'I wish the tame Tartar further, oh! distinctly I do,' she said to herself.

Just then the carriage stopped, the bell rang. Miss Crookenden came quickly upstairs and entered the room. She paused just inside the door, and it so happened that the shrinking sunlight fell on the silver embroidery of her dress. She appeared singularly fair and tall, proud as some young Amazon in her glistening armour. Her face was a little hard in expression. Her eyes shone large and sombre amid the colourless lustre of her complexion.

'Asleep, Sara?' she asked.

'No, my dear, not in the very least,' the elder woman replied genially. 'I have been squaring my accounts with the past this afternoon, and I find I have a nice little balance in hand on the side of thankfulness. How goes the world with you?'

'It goes all awry,' the girl answered—'execrably awry. I have not a pen'orth of balance on the side of thankfulness.'

She divested herself of bonnet and over-jacket, and threw them into the nearest chair.

'Your head better?' she asked, pausing in the midst of this somewhat unceremoniously conducted operation.

Madame Jacobini permitted herself to tell a little fib.—'Oh! yes, quite well,' she said, though her eyeballs felt red-hot and seemed to bore back and back into her brain.

'Then there is a trifle to be thankful for after all.'

Mary came over and sat beside her, let herself slip down against the cushions till her head rested on her friend's shoulder, fondled her hands as they rested on her lap.

'Sara, I am in a fix—I am in a hole,' she said. 'I don't quite know what to do. I am pulled in so many different directions. I have come to four cross-roads, and I can't decide which to take. Looking along each I see a lion in the path.'

'Dear me, the visits must have been remarkably eventful,' observed Madame Jacobini.

'Oh! it was not the visits. I took my worriments out with me. But worriments always have

power to add to their number. I met Lancelot.' Mary pressed coaxingly a little closer.—'Sara, I want comforting,' she said. 'Would you mind putting your arms around my waist?—so—that's right. You are sure your head's better, and that I don't bother you?—Generally, you know, I can keep the dear boy in order and prevent his burning his fingers; but to-day I was stupid and self-absorbed, thinking about the cross-roads and the worriments. It was horrid of me; I ought to have been more careful; and he burnt his fingers badly—very badly. And it was hateful to see him burn them; all the more so because, instead of being angry and giving me the slating I deserved, he bore the pain like a hero, like a saint.'

'Ah—ah—ah,' murmured Madame Jacobini softly, in a falling cadence. 'You have decided against that one of the cross-roads, then?'

Mary raised her head.—'How can I help it, Sara? she said. 'I care for him too much to think of marrying him.'

'Heaven help us, what a reason!' cried Madame Jacobini. 'It is certainly left for the latter end of this marvellous nineteenth century to discover that affection is a valid argument against marriage.'

'It is quite true, though,' the girl said. 'I have thought it all out.'

'Ah! you all think too much!'

'It is only prudent to think,' Mary Crookenden answered. 'Supposing I did as he wants me to do, and then later found I was bored, how horrible for him! It is much kinder to make him rather unhappy

now than run that risk. You see Lance is incapable of being bored. At the end of a hundred years he would be just as dear and kind, just as ready to indulge and take care of me, as he is now. There would be nothing accidental in the business. One would always know precisely where one was. I can map it all out—London, Slerracombe, Slerracombe, London; high respectability, a model *ménage,* Aunt Caroline's displeasure abating as time went on, and—and—as there came to be appeasing grandchildren; Lancelot irreproachable in every relation of life, and nothing, nothing to look forward to. Never the least ripple of adventure to stir the surface.'

Mary's head went down again on her friend's shoulder.—'Sara,' she said, 'I think there is nothing more beautiful than that sort of life; just husband and children, putting aside the development of one's own nature as some women can, and using any gifts one may have simply to make one's people happy—merging all private ambition in ambition for the second generation. I am not sure that it is not the ideal for us women—what we were originally intended for. But though I admire it, I cannot rise to it.'

'You have thought it all out, indeed,' murmured Madame Jacobini.

'I am not equal to that—yet. To settle down to it is too great an act of self-abnegation. I dare not risk it—no, I daren't. Supposing, as I say, five or six years hence I found it intolerable? No, I can give no sufficient securities. It would be wicked to let Lancelot invest all his capital of future happiness in me. Don't you see that it would?'

'You are too logical,' the elder woman said, 'you are far too reasonable. You do not allow enough for modifications of time, of habit.'

'You mean, after a while, one would get conveniently dull, go round like a horse in a mill? I don't see the fun of condemning one's self to be a horse in a mill.'

'Are you not a little perverse, my dear?' inquired Madame Jacobini.

'Indeed, indeed, Sara, I am trying to do what is right,' Mary said in her grave tones. She raised her head, and kissed her friend's cheek.

Those kisses were very disarming. Madame Jacobini held the girl close and tenderly. She yearned over her, she was distressed for her. For it seemed as though this young creature might have put to sea in such safe and pleasant sort, had she only been minded to do so; might have stepped on board a marriage-ship, furnished with sails of silk and masts of sandal, and made a life's voyage over such very tranquil and sunny waters. But she was not minded to do so. She asked excitement and adventure. Only too probable she would get them, for in the long run we all of us do get very much that which we ask. And when they came, in what spirit would she meet them? Madame Jacobini was sorry. But she did not protest. She had no faith in trying to make any one happy against his or her will.

'Well, we have disposed of one road, then,' she said presently; 'how about the others?'

Some time elapsed before the girl answered. She had drawn a little away, sat with her head bent, play-

ing idly with the fan lying on the elder woman's lap. It cost her something to speak.

'Sara,' she began, getting at her point in a rather roundabout fashion, 'it is an admitted fact that I am changeable, isn't it?'

'Fully admitted, I think,' the other said, not without malice.

'Should you despise me very much if I acted up to my reputation, and threw over my work at the Connop School.

Madame Jacobini was taken by surprise. She opened her mouth, and brought her teeth together with a slight snap. It was a snap of relief, of satisfaction.

'On the contrary, I shall be glad,' she answered. 'I never cared very enthusiastically about your going to the Connop School. And since the tame Tartar has been in possession, my last drop of enthusiasm, as I think you know, has evaporated.'

Mary drew away a trifle further.

'Mr. Colthurst has been very kind to me. He has taken a lot of pains with me. He has done all in his power to help me.'

'I can credit it,' Madame Jacobini exclaimed, not without irony.

'I shall always be grateful to him—always,' the girl continued.

'By all means, my dear. Gratitude for benefits received is most becoming. But one can imagine circumstances under which it is perhaps just as well cultivated at a distance from the benefactor.'

'You are very much prejudiced against Mr. Colthurst,' Mary said.

'I confess he has not taken me by storm on the three or four occasions when I have had the honour of encountering him.'

'He is very clever,' Mary said.

'In these days that is no distinction. Every one is clever—hideously, detestably clever.'

Miss Crokenden rose, and with a certain deliberation put another log on the fire. From among the glowing embers flames sprang up to meet it. The girl knelt on the fender-stool, watching the tongues as they licked greedily round the flaky edges of the wood.

'Most people's cleverness is merely a pose,' she said; 'it doesn't amount to much. It rubs off when you get to know them. We've all been clever because cleverness has happened to be the fashion lately. In a year or two the fashion will have gone out, and then we shall be gloriously stupid again.' She paused a minute. 'Mr. Colthurst's cleverness is not subject to fashion. It is ingrained. He can't help it. I don't believe he could be stupid even if he tried.'

'Poor man, how frightfully exhausting!' Madame Jacobini commented with feeling.

Mary still watched the tongues of flame clasping the wood.

'Yes, it is frightfully exhausting, too exhausting for me; and that is why I don't propose going back to the Connop School again. The demand he makes is too great; I am not equal to meeting it. I must give up trying to be modern, and professional, and

all that. It is beyond me. Of course it is disappointing—tremendously disappointing—but I must resign myself to re-entering the ranks of ordinary, common-place young womanhood.'

She stood up, her back to the fire, and her hands clasped rather tightly behind her.

'If I had courage and conviction enough to give myself over, and just submit to be taught—turn sponge and drink it all in, you know—I believe I might do a good deal under that fine teaching. But I have not the courage to turn sponge. There are foreign bodies in the water. I daren't drink them in. They're not good for me—or I imagine they are not. I get frightened.'

Mary paused again, and then laughed, with an effort to throw the whole matter aside. She was more affected than she cared to own. She did not want her friend to gauge the depth of her feeling. She did not enjoy plumbing that depth herself indeed. Accurate knowledge of it seemed to her to trench on danger.

'Oh! I am afraid I am a very twopenny-halfpenny sort of young person, after all, Sara,' she said, 'whose affairs don't merit any such careful consideration. I am feeble, deplorably feeble. That's the fact. I daren't take this risk, I daren't take the other—always a lion in the path. I shall end by muddling my life contemptibly before——'

And there she stopped abruptly.

Chapter III.

That Hannah, the parlour-maid, advanced salver in hand, on the salver a visiting-card, that this usually imperturbable handmaiden was slightly ruffled, none too well pleased with her commission—all this Madame Jacobini, from her station upon the sofa, saw clearly enough. It vexed her, for her head ached viciously and the pieties demanded seclusion. But she saw more than this, and for that overplus and extra Hannah's advent with the visiting-card appeared insufficient cause. Miss Crookenden's attitude was peculiar. She was looking towards the doorway. Madame Jacobini did not command a view of the doorway.

'Who on earth is it?' she exclaimed, suddenly becoming nervous. She had a conviction something was going to happen—something she should not the least like. 'Who on earth is it?' she repeated; but Mary did not answer.

The girl's features had stiffened, so, indeed, had her whole frame, with a sensation part resentment, part an emotion strangely vital and intimate. It was new to her. It angered her. It made her eyes dilate, and sent the blood tingling down to her finger-tips. And side by side with the anger a gladness—a gladness not without an element of alarm in it. She had no need to read the name on the visiting-card. The owner of both had followed hard on the heels of the parlour-maid. And his high-shouldered figure was very evident now in the doorway, dark against the light of the stairway behind. Erect, the fingers of his

left hand dragging at his shirt collar, Colthurst waited on the threshold, looking across the daintily-furnished, white and apricot-coloured rooms, with their bowls of violets set on quaint stands and tables, their tall bushes of tea-roses, their books, pictures, *bibelots,* their effect of graceful luxury, to where their fair young mistress stood before the dancing fire in her suit of fairy mail.

Madame Jacobini and Hannah spoke simultaneously.

'Who is it, Mary? Is there time for me to beat a retreat?'

'I said you were engaged, ma'am. But the gentleman insisted he must see you. He said he would not detain you.'

Hannah's tone was decidedly sniffy, heavily charged with self-defence.

Miss Crookenden glanced towards her friend. 'There's not time—I mean, please stay,' she said.

For the next few seconds Madame Jacobini's brain worked rather too fast for comfort, considering that same vicious headache. For as Colthurst crossed the room for the first time she measured the inherent weight and power of the man, became sensible of the engrossing, absorbing force that was in him—saw and felt him, not off the surface as she had done hitherto, but by the quickened vision that comes often with a highly-strung condition of nerves. A headache may be a very illuminating medium through which to view matters sometimes. 'The creature reminds me of a whirlpool,' she thought.—'Woe to the woman who falls into it. She will spin and spin helplessly

till she is swallowed up.'—And then she looked hard at Mary Crookenden. We have said Madame Jacobini's sense of drama was acute. Something in the girl's attitude, a strainedness, a sort of holding of herself down and in, which Madame Jacobini saw, or fancied she saw, caused her very acute discomfort.—'Good Heavens! poor, dear, foolish, unfortunate child,' she said to herself. The kindly-hearted woman was quite overcome, lost her *savoir faire,* lost her readiness of speech and action for the time being, leant back against the piled-up sofa cushions, a profound sense of regret upon her. Alack for that silken-sailed marriage-ship! Madame Jacobini would willingly, joyfully have given every penny she possessed to see the girl safely on board of it as Lancelot Crookenden's promised bride, still better as his wedded wife. Meanwhile, as I say, she lost her readiness. The crisis had come upon her with a rush. She could not tell how to act for the best, how to interfere. In her confusion she missed Colthurst's first words, failed to apprehend the purport of his rapid speech.

'You think I have no b-business here, Miss Crookenden,' he was saying, with disconcerting abruptness. 'I seem to be guilty of an intrusion. I am afraid I did not stop to consider that carefully. It was necessary that I should ask your opinion about a matter of considerable importance to myself, and indirectly to others as well. As you were not at school to-day, I came off here as soon as I could get away.'

The substance of Colthurst's address was personal, but his manner of delivering it was impersonal. He

had himself very well in hand. Notwithstanding the excitement generated in him by Mary Crookenden's presence, by the fact of finding himself here in her house and home, Colthurst managed to take up the purely official, dogmatic tone which he had preserved in his intercourse with her during the past eight or ten weeks. He wanted no melting. Melting was precisely that which would defeat his purpose in coming here. He was true to his singular declaration of yesterday. His will was firm against any lessening of the distance that divided him from Miss Crookenden. He looked at her as little as possible, nor did he look about him. This was an occasion when the perception of attractive external details was carefully to be avoided.

The girl had no answer to make to his statement. She motioned him towards the sofa.

'I think you know my friend, Madame Jacobini,' she said loftily as she could.

For Mary also wished to keep the tone of this interview down to the level of their ordinary intercourse. But that queer gladness took part against her wishes, against her social sense. She made a brave stand; but from the first she had a disturbing suspicion that she was playing a losing game.

Colthurst bowed mechanically to the sofa and any body or thing that might happen to be on it. Then he addressed her again:—'The matter in question is this, Miss Crookenden. Sylvester has resigned. They have offered me the p-professorship. Shall I ac-accept it?'

Mary hesitated. Her first instinct was to con-

gratulate him. Her charming eyes kindled. Then prudence gained over sympathy.

'Really, I am quite incapable of giving an opinion on the subject,' she said, coldly. 'You must know best whether the appointment is likely to prove a help or a hindrance to you. I cannot judge.'—She clasped her hands again rather tight behind her.—'What have I to do with it? You have no right to make me responsible in such a serious matter, Mr. Colthurst.'

'Ah! but you must inevitably be responsible,' he exclaimed. 'You can't help it. I can't help it either. The whole question turns on your wishes, your desires.'

Colthurst spoke very fast—so fast that once more Madame Jacobini failed to catch his exact words. But she saw Mary lift her head as in proud annoyance, saw her eye-lids droop, and her face flush. The good woman sat on thorns. Yet what to do?—she asked herself in growing alarm—what had already taken place between them, and how far had it gone? She was all in the dark. She must wait on events, lest she should get hold of the stick disastrously by the wrong end and so make confusion worse confounded.

Colthurst, meanwhile, was sensible that he had slipped somewhat. He turned away, restlessly, took a small trefoil-tailed china monster—representation of the sacred dog Toh, plainest-headed among hounds—off the chimney-piece just behind him, and began twisting it about, gazing at its goggle eyes and benignly-grinning mouth. It steadied him to have something to handle, in a sense to torture. Inwardly,

he cursed the shrewd, kindly woman sitting on the sofa. If she would go, if she would only remove herself! But evidently she did not intend to remove herself, and he had a delicate thing to say to Miss Crookenden, a thing which might easily be misconstrued. It was almost impossible to say it before a third person. Yet he had come with the express purpose of saying it. He did not mean to depart until it had been said. But Madame Jacobini's silent inspection and observation harassed him. He was beginning to lose his nerve. So he determined to say it at once. He faced round, spoke louder and more deliberately, though in so doing he knew he risked an outbreak of stammering. If the woman would hear, well, let her hear, then—and make what she could of it.

'What I came to ask you is this,' he said. 'You have not been to the school to-day. I am afraid I have d-divined why you did not come. Social, conventional fetiches intruded themselves. They intimated that the Connop School might be an embarrassing, equivocal sort of place for you after—well, after what occurred yesterday. And you had not quite d-daring enough to defy the fetiches. Wasn't it so?'

Madame Jacobini leaned forward, fanning herself. She was all eyes and ears just then.

'Merciful powers! What next?' she ejaculated under her breath.

Colthurst was one of those inconvenient persons who have the gift of compelling you, willy nilly, to speak the truth.

'Yes, it was,' Mary Crookenden assented; while her

glance followed the motions of the man's handsome hands playing in their neatly violent way with the little china monster.

'And the conventional fetiches were wrong, as they usually are, Miss Crookenden. Pray understand once and for all,' Colthurst said, quietly, 'that the very last thing I intend is to be a nuisance to you; to traffic on past kindness; to b-bore and pester you with my affairs, my susceptibilities, my attacks of blue devils. Gratitude is not always a lively sense of favours to come, though it may amuse cheap cynics to say so. I assure you I have a very sufficient capacity for holding my tongue if needs be. Y-yesterday, I was p-pressed beyond endurance. I lost my head. But I shall not lose it again. I have taken measures to prevent the recurrence of the pressure of yesterday which I have no doubt will prove effectual.'

Colthurst paused a moment. His expression was not exactly saintly, and Madame Jacobini, glancing from the man to the girl as they stood together on the hearthrug, could not but be struck, in the midst of all her anxiety, by the telling contract they offered. Light and darkness, night and morning, beauty and the beast. Nevertheless, she admitted a certain grandeur in the beast.

'So, in as far as I am concerned, in as far as your work at the Connop School is concerned, you can draw a wet sponge across your memories of yesterday —wipe them out, obliterate them, if you desire it.'

'Ah, but I can't do that,' the girl cried almost involuntarily.

Colthurst's breath came very short. His face grew

thin as he looked at her, and the look was heavy with a question. But Mary had retreated upon the sofa. She leaned against the arm of it close to Madame Jacobini. Her back was to the light, her face and figure in shadow, only a yellow-red glint of the fire here and there upon the silver embroidery about the hem of her dress. Colthurst's fingers closed like a vice upon goggle-eyed Toh.

'Then it only remains for me to ask you to be so kind as to tell me p-plainly whether my accepting the directorship of the school will prove an objection to your coming there in future? I shall be grateful if you will answer me frankly; b-because, if it proves so I shall decline the appointment.'

He said the last few words very simply. His taste may be called in question at times. His sincerity, I am happy to say, never. Yet it was no slight matter to him, that proposal to decline the appointment. For to-day had been big with triumph as yesterday with defeat. He had felt the pulse of his school to-day; found that it beat true, loyally, towards him. A deputation of students had waited upon him with enthusiastic demand that he would continue to reign over them. Much pleasing feeling had been exhibited towards him, many pleasant words spoken. For, indeed, it appeared to the majority of these sixty and odd young people that the daily routine of frog-pond existence would become deadly dull if King Stork should abdicate, and some good, ordinary, uneventful King Log mount the throne. King Stork might bully and overwork them; might be exacting and merciless; his criticisms might be harsh, even scathing; but he

knew what he was about, and he made them know what they were about also. He managed to educe whatever fraction of cleverness might be in them. The spirit of discipleship was abroad in Connop School; they entreated him not to leave them. And the excellent Barwell seconded their vote of confidence with much complimentary tail-wagging. Colthurst wore him nearly to fiddle-strings, it is true, as persons of strong vitality inevitably wear their weaker brethren. But wearing thin in a good cause appeared to Mr. Barwell of the nature of a privilege. Colthurst had come to form one of the principal interests of his life. Where would agreeable suspicion of adventure be, where those ticklings of surprise and wonder be so relished? He must bid good-bye to all hope of witnessing fireworks, sustaining electric shocks, if Colthurst ceased to rule over him. So he too cried, stay. Colthurst was touched, grateful. He rejoiced in his work, rejoiced to make his ideas obtain and prevail, rejoiced to be thus free to preach his gospel to fit audience; by no means despised either the certainty of a secure and, for himself, sufficient income. And so it was no light matter, surely, for him to come thus and offer to throw over all these alluring prospects to save chance of embarrassment to such a very impenetrable damsel as Miss Crookenden seemed bent on proving herself. Verily Love makes most thoroughpaced simpletons of the ablest among us; woefully perverts judgment, making the worst appear the better reason, making us fling aside indisputably solid advantages in favour of the shadow of the merest shade. How shall we regard you, Love?

Shall we adore or detest you for this crazy miracle-working of yours? Is the madness you engender divine or brutish? Probably, rightly considered, something of both.

And now Colthurst, in obedience to that sweet madness, repeated his offer—making it, in itself, appear a small matter, thanks to the reasons he adduced in support of it—being filled, meanwhle, with the almost voluptuous sense of satisfaction which comes, at the first blush anyhow, from the performance of any genuine act of self-devotion.

'You have an unusual amount of talent,' he went on; 'and you owe it to yourself to give that talent the fullest training and exercise obtainable. It mustn't be balked, stunted, frustrated, as women's talents generally are, by inadequate teaching, by timid nasty-nice notions of the degree of knowledge which is safe and suitable for their sex. And that's why I have come to you now, Miss Crookenden. The Connop School is the only place here in England where your talent will receive anything like fair play. So you must stay there. And if my staying there too is an impediment, stands in the way of your staying'—Colthurst turned away and put the little china monster back on the chimney-piece—'very well, then, I must go,' he said. 'They'll easily fill my place. *Il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire,* you know. So don't hesitate to say what you wish. Yes or no—it shall be just as you please.'

There was a momentary silence. Then Mary said gently, gravely—'You are very magnanimous.'

Once more Colthurst knew what it was to be con-

tent. 'Not so very magnanimous,' he answered, 'since in pleasing you I take the very b-best possible means of pleasing myself.'

But here Madame Jacobini arose mentally from the state of prostration into which headache and the abnormal character, both of the visitor and his communications had plunged her.

'Plague the man, he becomes abominably attractive, abominably coercive,' she said to herself. 'This won't do. He must be snuffed out.'

She rallied her forces, marshalled her scattered wits, rushed in valiantly where angels—comprehending the whole drift of the business, as it is only civil to suppose that superior intelligences would—might have feared to tread.

'Oddly enough, we were just discussing this very question—weren't we, Mary?'—when Mr. Colthurst was announced,' she declared briskly. 'The question of the prosecution of Miss Crookenden's studies, I mean, at the Connop School. I will tell you all about it, Mr. Colthurst. Miss Crookenden needs change; I have long thought so; now she admits it. We had agreed—hadn't we, Mary?—just arrived at the conclusion—' here Madame Jacobini reached up and patted the young lady's knee, as the latter leaned on the corner of the sofa, including her and the dark figure standing on the hearthrug, in one of her widest and most genial smiles—'just arrived at it when you, Mr. Colthurst, appeared so opportunely though unexpectedly upon the scene. Just agreed that the time had come when the Connop School must be reckoned among the things of the past. Miss

Crookenden has enjoyed her work there immensely,' she continued vivaciously leaning forward, nodding at Colthurst with imperturbable amiability—'haven't you, Mary? And no doubt profited by it also. That I take for granted under such able tuition. But even the most enjoyable things must come to an end, you know, Mr. Colthurst. There is a limit set to our most agreeable experiences?'

As she finishd speaking, Madame Jacobini rose. She intended to snuff the man out, once and for all to show him his place; but it was not quite a nice thing to do. She could not help being sorry for him. Yet, as it had to be done, she proposed doing it thoroughly. Not a smoulder of red should be left in the wick.

'Miss Crookenden's connection with the Connop School is severed,' she went on, using her hands in a very telling bit of pantomime descriptive of cutting off uncommonly short. 'It is most courteous and considerate of you to call, Mr. Colthurst, and give us this information about your appointment.'—Madame Jacobini's smile widened, grew largely, richly genial. —'But you see, as far as Miss Crookenden enters into the question you have arrived the day after the fair. The case was already closed. The verdict, funnily enough, just given.—I am afraid it is rather late to offer you tea. It seems to have got dusk very quickly to-night. Shall I ring for the lamps, Mary, as I am up?'

Madame Jacobini congratulated herself. She had handled the snuffers to some purpose this time, or she was very much mistaken. Had let the man down

with a slam; soused him up to the neck in common-sense; had drawn his poison-fangs, and need have no further anxiety in his direction, at present. She moved across to the bell. Hannah and lamps, she thought, would finish him off, complete his discomfiture.

Colthurst moved also. Came right in front of the girl, still leaning on the corner of the sofa, her slim grey form somewhat impalpable in the deepening twilight.

'G-good-bye, Miss Crookenden,' he stammered. 'Your friend has very kindly saved me from all possibility of misapprehension. Her explanation of the situation has b-been m-most masterly.'

Colthurst put two fingers inside his shirt-collar and wrenched it outward. He felt he had been fooled, shamed; and it made him a little mad to have his self-devotion flung back thus, like a dirty rag, in his face.

'I resign you to the undisturbed worship of the conventional fetiches—for that's what it really means, what it all really comes to,' he said, bitterly. 'Worship them in peace, supported by the approval of all right-minded persons of your acquaintance; selling, as such persons always press the artist to sell it, your birthright for a mess of paltry social pottage. And yet I am sorry,' he added, with a sudden change of tone; 'very sorry. It seems a pity; for the social fetiches are secure of plenty of worshippers, any way, and you are capable of worshipping better things!'

'Ah! no,' Mary answered. 'You have over-rated me, you have romanced about me, you have—'

But here suddenly, her voice faltered, broke. She

stood upright, stretched out her hands in swift violence of entreaty.

'Oh! leave me alone, please leave me alone,' she cried. 'You are too strong for me, too great for me. I can't cope with you. You bruise and hurt me. I lose my identity; you break me all to pieces. Leave me alone, oh, leave me alone, Mr. Colthurst,' she said.

Hannah and lights. The face of the woman he loved seen for an instant blanched, strangely troubled, piteous in its child-like distress. Then the open door, the chill of the spring evening in the lamp-lit street.

'D-damn doing right,' was what Colthurst said to himself.

And in the white and apricot-coloured room, meanwhile, a long silence. The two women sitting side by side again. Madame Jacobini was affected, slightly remorseful. She had snuffed the man out, disposed of him; but no, decidedly it was not a nice thing to do. Mary's silence disturbed her, moreover.

'Was I right, darling child?' she inquired at last.

'Quite right, Sara; but—but—' the girl shuddered, and her breath caught hysterically, 'Oh! Sara, hold me tight. Love me, comfort me, I am very unhappy,' she said.

'My dear, my dear,' murmured Madame Jacobini. Then she determined to probe the wound and discover if it was of dangerous depth. So she asked the time-honoured, ever-recurring question, which, simple though it is, covers most of the misery of every woman's life:—'Do you care for him, Mary?'

'I don't know, I hope not, because it would be ut-

terly useless for me to care.' Miss Crookenden spoke slowly, wearily. 'There is something behind, something horrible, tragic—I don't know what, and I would rather not know. He hinted at it yesterday.'

'Did he?' exclaimed Madame Jacobini.

Remorse vanished. She began to feel quite comfortable over her use of the snuffers. Again silence, broken only by the roll of carriages. At a house just across the street there was a dinner-party, matting let down over the pavement, an awning put out, a row of children and perambulators drawn up to right and left watching the arriving guests.

'He gives me a feeling nobody ever gave me before,' Mary went on presently.

'Does he?' murmured Madame Jacobini, with meaning.

'It is a terrible fealing, Sara. It scares me. I don't know where it would lead to.'—Mary pressed her face against her friend's shoulder, and shuddered again.—'I must get rid of it, get rid of it at all costs. Sara, should you mind my going down to Brattleworthy to Uncle Kent? I know you don't care for the country till the year is well aired; but I could quite well go alone—with Chloe, I mean. I know I am cowardly, but I should be so thankful to get into the dear, clean restful country, where everything seems simple, less perplexed.'

'You shall start for anywhere—Central Asia by the night express, if that will make you happier. But Brattleworthy,' Madame Jacobini's eyebrows went well up into her hair, 'it is next door to Beera Mills and—my dear, I don't want to plague you by sug-

gestions of further perplexity—but—*que faire?* It is useless to blink the truth. At Beera is the clerical Admirable Crichton waiting for his answer.'

'I have thought of all that. But perhaps he won't be at home. He's been a great deal at Aldham Revel since poor Lady Aldham's illness took this bad turn. Miss Aldham told me so yesterday.'

'Still, railways exist, I believe, and it is open to him to take a ticket and come home again. He will come home again,' Madame Jacobini added with conviction, 'and that promptly, when he learns you are at Brattleworthy. Don't lay the flattering unction to your soul, that you are going to slip out of making an answer, Mary. You gave him a note-of-hand, payable at seven months. The young man is punctual. He is not in the very least likely to forget to ask for a settlement.'

'Oh! very well then, let him ask for it.'

Mary kissed her friend lightly on the cheek. She had recovered her composure. She left the sofa, went over and knelt on the fender-stool, watching the now bright fire; up-leaping flames once more eagerly clasping the flaky edges of the wood.

'I don't mind if he does ask for it, Sara,' she said quietly. 'Indeed, I am not sure that I should not be rather obliged to him if he did. For, of all the various lions, the one in that path really seems to me the least dangerous and objectionable.'—She paused a minute.—'I am not at all sure Mr. Aldham is not part of the restfulness. There are no hidden things in his life I dare not know. If he still wants me he may have me—for he gives me no feelings.'

'Good heavens!' cried Madame Jacobini, 'there is another of your perverted nineteenth-centuryisms! It has indeed been left for modernity to discover an argument in favour of a suitor's eligibility in the fact that he leaves you as cold as a stone.'

Miss Crokenden ignored the small sarcasm.

'He is good,' she continued, 'and not at all stupid. Marrying him would be remarkably safe, and just now I have a perfectly gluttonous appetite for safety.'—She put her hands on to the mantelshelf, and drew herself up into a standing position.—'I'll telegraph to Uncle Kent to-morrow, and go down the day after, if you really don't mind.—Dear me, there's the gong. Don't you bother about dressing, Sara you're tired; and I won't be five minutes hustling into my frock.'

Just then her eyes lighted on dog Toh, lying grinning on the mantelshelf—dog Toh in two pieces, snapped right across his sacred middle. Mary started, and that odd shuddering ran through her once more, while the colour rushed into her face. She was angry with herself, yet an unreasoning gladness re-awoke in her. Then, very carefully, she picked up the pieces.

'Ah! he's broken,' she said. 'I must stick him together again.'

And she carried goggle-eyed dog Toh away with her up to her room. From which may it not be surmised that Madame Jacobini's use of the snuffers came a trifle—just a trifle—late?

Chapter IV.

It was Easter Eve. The sea like a great pale turquoise, the sky like a great pale sapphire; their meeting veiled in banks of opalescent mist, fading almost imperceptibly into the opaque blue below and the clear blue above. The bare treeless land across Yeomouth Bay, where it rose above the mist, a mosaic of frail yellowish pink, lilac, yellowish dun. A little fleet of white-sailed coasting vessels standing out to sea, till the flowing tide should serve to carry them in over the bar to the broad still reaches of the estuary. hills edging the blue water. At the far end of them the lighthouse, showing like a splash of whitewash against the warm lilac of the hilly country inland—which rises, one swelling upland above another, to the wide quiet of the purple moor.

All this Cyprian Aldham saw as he turned out of the steep lane on to the high road at Beera Cross—saw it with the approbation beautiful scenery invariably called forth in him. But he did not linger. He had no inclination this afternoon for brooding intercourse with Nature. He took in the fair land- and sea-scape at a glance, and let it hang in the background of his mind as a pleasing and therefore suitable drop-scene against which the drama of his thoughts and affairs might play itself out undisturbed. For aspects of Nature were an accessory today, and the private concerns of Cyprian Aldham undoubtedly occupied the first place in Cyprian Aldham's attention. Moreover, he was in a hurry—in as much, that is, of a hurry as a person of so cool, direct,

and well-regulated nature can be. Evening service in the small church clinging against the wooded combe-side was at seven o'clock, and it was nearly four now. Aldham proposed walking to Brattleworthy Rectory, and being back in decent time for the said service. He could not therefore afford to loiter. He stepped out at a good pace along the high road,—here bordered by strips of coarse grass and heather, interspersed with little thickets of bramble and blackthorn, of willow in full glory of furry grey and yellow catkins, of stunted oaks and hazels; and shut in, on either hand, by high earth-banks topped with gorse and gemmed with innumerable primroses.

The air was light, exercise pleasant, and Aldham in that condition of serne self-complacency which serves persons of refinement and high cultivation in lieu of the vulgar animal spirits common to low-caste humanity. And indeed the young man had very fair cause for self-complacency. He had long purposed certain things, and in the last week had realized that which he purposed. Three days ago, without marked enthusiasm, it is true, but also without hesitation, Mary Crookenden had accepted him, had definitely promised to become his wife. Aldham was in love, genuinely in love, according to his capacity of loving. That capacity is, of course, very different in different individuals, and his capacity was not that of a St. Preux any more than of a Don Juan. His was a perfectly sane affection, not a bit likely to get out of hand, kick over the traces, indulge in violences and eccentricities of devotion. It was the sincere preference of a proud and perhaps hard man for one woman

as distinct from all other women, though he did not for a moment profess to think the woman in question a perfect being. On the contrary, Aldham considered that his mistress was not insusceptible of improvement in many directions. Some men's love is formative, educative; is convinced, not only of the high desirability, but of its own entire capacity, of adding finishing touches to the mind and character of the beloved one. Aldham acknowledged many duties on the part of the husband to the wife.—Let it not be supposed for an instant that I refer to such crudities of right conduct as being faithful to and not beating her. They belong to a level of practical morality, or rather immorality, to which the young clergyman was incapable of descending, even in thought. The duties he acknowledged were of a much more civilized order.—Aldham, believing sincerely in the superiority of the masculine intelligence, proposed to mould his wife, to modify some of her tendencies, root out some of her inclinations, teach her much that it would be greatly to her advantage to know. His judgment would be her final court of appeal; his wishes in all serious matters her rule and law. The time was young yet, but Mary had displayed a degree of gentle submission towards him during the last few days which was altogether flattering and encouraging to his educative hopes and intentions.

'I have been wise,' he said to himself, bestowing a glance on the blue of the bay over the top of a gate as he passed. 'She asked me to wait, and I waited. I was very patient, and I did right. Now her choice

is deliberate. I think we fully understand one another.'

Bold words, betraying perhaps a measure of inexperience in our admirable young clergyman. For do two human beings—specially of opposite sex—ever fully understand one another? Have any two ever done so since the world began? History and personal observation alike answer in the negative, I fear; for, alas! the finest and liveliest imagination stops short of complete comprehension of the thoughts, aims, predilections, of even the nearest and best loved. For is not each one of us, after all, under sentence of something very like perpetual solitary confinement in the prison-house of our own individuality?

But it was not only that Cyprian Aldham had attained in the matter of his annexation of Miss Crookenden. That morning he had heard of the death of his aunt, Lady Aldham, and this event made a considerable difference in his prospects. Cyprian felt at liberty to contemplate the poor lady's death chiefly from the standpoint of his own fortunes; for it had been long expected, in a sense long hoped for, and might justly be considered to be what is often rather euphemistically described as a 'happy release.' Over fifty years of easy comfort, of the sheltered existence wherein no rough word is ever heard or rough sight seen, all the luxuries of the harem, in short, without its disabilities and restrictions—for, upon my word, it sometimes occurs to one that women of the upper classes here in England often have a quite unreasonably good time of it—this followed by a strange reverse, by six months of such pain and disgust as give

the lie to human progress and laugh the efforts of our vaunted science to scorn. Disease is a famous leveller. Neither wit nor virtue, neither wealth nor position, houses or land, move Siva the Destroyer to spare when he is minded to strike. He sends out his emissaries, and they do his bidding relentlessly. In this case he ordained that a delicately-nurtured woman should die of cancer, and of cancer she accordingly died. But the process was a slow one,—the gods can afford to take their time, having all eternity at their disposal,—and during the process certain changes took place in the poor lady's attitude of mind.

Like so many charming women of her class, Lady Aldham was undisciplined, and consequently slightly vindictive, unreasonable, unjust. The demands upon her forbearance and submission having been rare, those graces had grown somewhat rusty, and failed to present themselves in good working order when Providence mercifully supplied her with an opportunity for their employment. She had, for many years now, been offered such an opportunity in relation to her husband's nephew and heir, Cyprian Aldham. For the young man's existence was, in plain English, a perpetual vexation to her; he had embodied, to her, the great disappointment of her life. She had gone on hoping against hope for the child who would render his claims abortive. But the child never came. Cyprian, meanwhile, certainly was not guilty of intruding himself, his behaviour was laudably circumspect; but Lady Aldham found offence in his very circumspection. It irritated her. He put forth no claims, gave himself no airs of a moneyed

young man; worked hard, took a good degree; went into the Church; was licensed to a London curacy very much more distinguished for its opportunities of labour than for its social advantages; broke down in health; went abroad as bear-leader to Lancelot Crookenden; buried himself in an obscure West Country parish. Had he been obsequious, had he flattered a little, made up to the poor lady, she would probably have forgiven him the iniquity of his existence; but the independence he showed was merely a fault the more. To many women it is the unpardonable sin that you should give them no trouble, keep out of their way, be quite well able to do without them.

But when Siva stretched out his hand against her, as we have said, Lady Aldham's attitude of mind changed. She desired to make her peace with the young man; but she desired something more than this. She loved her husband jealously, exclusively. And Sir Reginald was a handsome, jovial, vigorous, middle-aged gentleman, tender-hearted and light-hearted at the same time. He was inconsolable for his wife's sufferings, prospectively inconsolable for her loss; but Lady Aldham had a terrible suspicion that the Inconsolable eventually of necessity seek consolation, just as surely as the Thirsty seek water. It is the moderate griefs that wear long, that kill—if, indeed, any griefs kill—not the noisy ones. Suppose Sir Reginald should seek consolation in the form of a second helpmeet? Suppose he should pay his wife the compliment—we are assured it is a high one—of giving her a successor Suppose that successor should

triumph where she had so lamentably failed? Suppose children's toys should one day litter the great stately rooms downstairs, children's shouts and laughter echo along the wide passages? Such thoughts, to Lady Aldham, were almost more cruel than the hand of Siva pressing on her poor tortured body. And being a woman of sincere though not very enlarged belief, she went a step further, asking the question asked by the Sadducees in Judea of old.—At the last, when they met again in that other world which was now drawing so solemnly near to her—coming forth out of the silence and mystery which had heretofore shrouded it, and confronting her as her only permanent reality—whose husband would Reginald be? To whom would he belong, this man whom she had loved, whose name she had borne? To her, or to that other Lady Aldham? Put baldly thus, such questionings sound almost grotesque. Yet these are the things the majority of us really do brood over, turn hither and thither with weariful persistence, as we lie a-dying—carrying on, in queer, not unpathetic simplicity, all the familiar furniture of our daily thought, what one may call the small clothes of our domestic and social circumstance, into the unknown regions ahead, where such little garments are probably very much out of fashion.

And so from a double motive she proceeded to make her peace with Cyprian Aldham. In proportion as Sir Reginald cared for his heir-presumptive, he would be unlikely to run the chance of dispossessing him by marrying again. From being an object of dislike, the young clergyman found himself suddenly con-

verted into an object of high consideration. He regarded this as a not unfitting reward for his past conduct, accepted it gladly as such; ministered to the poor lady in things spiritual in perfect good faith, having no notion that he was being erected as a barrier against the intrusion of some not impossible second Lady Aldham. For the present owner of that title could not bring herself to speak of the jealous fears that beset her. Moreover, she read the young man's character clearly enough to see that an appeal to self-interest would certainly not succeed with him. So she took refuge in committing the keeping of her husband's soul to him as a sacred trust. Even humbled herself, asking as pledge of forgiveness for past coldness that he would spend the greater part of his time in future at Aldham Revel. 'Marry and live with your uncle, save him from a lonely old age,' this was the woman's cry. Inwardly she added, 'save me from the humiliation, the agony of a supplanter.' She pressed the matter upon her husband, referred to it again and again, until the idea of such an arrangement became familiar to both gentlemen.

And it is odd how soon the mind accustoms itself to some new ideas. A year ago, had anyone suggested to Aldham he would contemplate giving up clerical work, and settling down as recognized heir-apparent to a big estate and big fortune, he would have repudiated the suggestion almost angrily. But now it had ceased to be in the least shocking to him; indeed, during the brief period of his engagement it had grown increasingly attractive. Aldham Revel would unquestionably be a very much more suitable setting

for Mary Crookenden than the dull little vicarage at Beera. How Sir Reginald would admire her! How she would impress the neighborhood—the dear, dignified old Mainwarings, the Selfords, the Adnitts of Lowcote, good-natured Mrs. Jack Enderby and her train of strapping boys and girls at Bassett Darcy; and the airified pleasure-seeking little world of Tullingworth, always sitting on the edge of its chair—though it doesn't a bit like one to say so—in hopes of recognition from 'the county.'

Now to-day, along with the announcement of his wife's death, had come a kindly word from Sir Reginald concerning his nephew's engagement and a renewal of the request that he would pack up and betake himself to Aldham Revel, bringing his bride along with him. 'You know how much your poor dear aunt thought about it,' he wrote. 'Almost the last talk I had with her she spoke of it. The notion had taken great hold of her, somehow. I hope you will see your way to carrying out her wishes.'

As he turned down over the top of Brattleworthy Hill, between the straggling row of whitewashed, slate-roofed cottages, Aldham was decidedly of opinion that he did see his way to carry out the said wishes. The period of doubt and indecision was passed. He could find a hundred-and-one excellent reasons for accepting the agreeable station in life to which it appeared to be the pleasure of Providence to call him. When inclination jumps with fate conscientious scruples are soon stilled, as a rule.

Passing beyond the cottages, Aldham opened a field gate on the right and struck across the steep

pastures. Below him lay the church and rectory half hidden by a plantation of oak and beech which shelters them from the west; the square mass of Slerracombe House; the diversified expanse of the park —its wooded valleys a patchwork of raw umber, rosy brown, ethereal green, lying between stretches of heather, golden gorse, succulent fresh-sprung bracken;—then the turquoise sea meeting the sapphire sky amid banks of opalescent mist, and the finely-tinted mosaic of far-away country. About half a mile out from shore some black-hulled skiffs from Beera, all, even to tan top-sails set to catch the light south-easterly breeze, heeling a little as they slipped along with the quaint curtseying motion which comes of the pull-back of the heavy trawl at the stern. Jackdaws and choughs, showing like a handful of glossy black seed thrown upward as they suddenly wheeled out in shrill vociferous companies from their nesting-places in the cliff face. Deer moving down from the open grass park near the house, to the mottled sunlight and shade of the valleys. A couple of buzzards soaring up and up in intersecting circles, on motionless, widespread, blunt-tipped wings. The 'wandering voice' of the first cuckoo, bold and blithe, in pertinacious repetition of his own gay name. And there, finally, fairest sight of all—for, as has been said, the young man was truly in love according to his capacity—on the high rising ridge of the next field, just before him, Mary Crookenden herself.

Aldham did not stay to open the gate. He laid his hand on the top bar and vaulted over it, performing

this athletic feat very neatly. Not without inward sense of satisfaction, too, for he was glad to know himself to be in as good condition physically as he was well assured of being intellectually and morally. Aldham dearly liked to have the whole of himself at command. He pushed on and was more than half way up the slope of turf before Mary became aware of his presence. Then, catching sight of him, she waved her hand and stood awaiting his approach.

To Cyprian her solitary white-clad figure—the curious in costume may be interested in learning that she wore a dress of white flannel—outlined against the sky, bare-headed, the sunshine lighting up the dim gold of her hair, seemed to gather up and embody the sweet, pure influences of that spring day. She appeared as very fit presiding genius of the bright, far-reaching landscape; while a charm of bird notes rose about her from thicket and woodland, and the soft breeze stirred her garments, swept away through the rectory plantation just below, and filled the sails of those curtseying skiffs out at sea. Aldham had an admirably retentive memory. He quoted some lines from Wordsworth, some from Matthew Arnold; and sincerely congratulated himself at the same time, on his excellent taste in the choice of a wife. His mental barometer stood at 'set fair.'

Nor was Mary's greeting calculated to depress the mercury. She was gentle; her graciousness had a pretty touch of deprecation in it. She seemed genuinely anxious to meet his wishes. She listened dutifully to all he had to say, admitting, when any slight difference of opinion arose, the justice of his argu-

ments. All of which was just as it should be, the educative, formative process happily inaugurating itself thus early in their joint career. Aldham was extremely pleased. He had hardly reckoned upon such docility on the part of his pupil. He enjoyed a most satisfactory three-quarters of an hour walking up and down the rectory pasture in the sunshine, refused tea, and started back in capital time for his evening service as well satisfied a young man of high culture and clear intentions as you are likely to meet.

The result of the interview may be stated brifly thus. The wedding, for which no date had as yet been fixed, was to take place in June—about six weeks hence. It was to be quite quiet, in respect for Lady Aldham's recent death. After a short honeymoon, Cyprian and his wife would take up their residence at Aldham Revel. On Tuesday he would go to the latter place to attend the funeral; Mary would travel up to London with him, and turn her attention seriously to the important matter of her trousseau. If Kent Crookenden could be prevailed upon to do so, he should go too, and then all business regarding settlements could be disposed of.

'Really it is delightful to find we understand each other so thoroughly,' Aldham said to himself as he followed the lane leading into the mile-long combe down to Beera again. 'Ah, good evening to you, Parris,' he added.

But Bill Parris, on his way to a preaching up at the dreary little hamlet of Codd's Camp—in honour of which pious exercise he had put a remarkably short-waisted, full-skirted, shiny black broad-cloth

coat over his canvas trousers and jersey—vouchsafed no intelligible response to this greeting. With his lazy rolling gait he lounged on, his hands in his pocket, and wild blue eyes fixed on the turn of the steep lane just ahead. Yet presumably he did recognise Mr. Aldham, and remembered moreover certain news concerning that gentleman current in Beera, of which his sister, Mrs. Sarah Jane Kingdon, had informed him that very morning, for he muttered as he went:—

'Marryin', marryin' and giving in marriage—same tale now as back along in the days of the patriarch Noah. But the Lord'll reward mun for their foolishness and the hardness of their hearts. He shall overthrow the ivory palaces in which they trust, and east mun out into the wilderness. There shall be wailin' and gnashing of teeth. And the saints shall rejoice against mun, and laugh mun to scorn. Praise the Lord,' he said, 'He'll bring down the pride of the lot of 'em and drag it in the dust.'

Chapter V.

Left alone Mary Crookenden fell into a considerable meditation, the immediate effect of which was that she went across the sunny pasture, through the plantation into the ugly whitewashed rectory (for all the world just like the house a child draws on a slate) and up to her bedroom. There, from an inner pocket of her travelling bag, she extracted a flattish oblong box of old Dutch silver. Armed with this, and hav-

ing ascertained that the Rector was still out in the parish and not likely to be back till near dinner time, she sallied forth again; made her way down into the deer-park, crossed the stream and turned up the grass path which, after passing across the hillside, showing like a winding ribbon of green amid the darker tones of the heath and gorse, dips over the shoulder of the hill to Red Rock Mouth.

She walked slowly, as was indeed only seemly, for she was about attending a funeral. The oblong silver box was, in point of fact, a coffin, containing a body symbolizing much. But whether that body was already a corpse or not Mary was not quite certain. Yet uncertainty only made her more anxious to complete the obsequies; for it appeared to her if a measure of life were still left in it, burial, deep, uncompromising, final, was even more necessary than if it was already well dead.

The subtleties of the feminine mind are infinite, its capacities of playing hide-and-seek with its own motives and desires not to be gauged. Yet even in the case of that most complex development of female humanity, the modern young woman, there is, more often than not, an underlying simplicity and, when it comes to a push, an innate rectitude with which the casual male observer would certainly not credit her. She has suspiciously liberal and cynical fashions of speech, as she has, too frequently, suspiciously loud and dashing fashions of dress; but beneath these are a pure mind and fair well-favoured body, singularly unspoiled and undistorted by the cut of the garments

in which the taste of the hour has impelled her to clothe them.

And it was precisely this abiding simplicity and inward rectitude which prompted Mary to set forth now, and do her best to bury that little corpse (as she trusted) and all which it symbolized. Upon good resolutions it is sadly easy to go back, especially for a young lady proverbially prone to change her mind. But upon an outward act, however quaintly parabolic, it is not so easy to go back. Shave your head when you swear, and you are much more likely to keep your oath, be sure, than if, trusting to the compelling power of your own high sense of honour merely, you remain unshaven.

So far Mary had regarded her lover, Cyprian Aldham, from the negative rather than the positive standpoint. Had thought less of the positive consequences of her engagement to him, his claims upon her, than of certain not inconceivable developments, from which she believed that engagement would deliver her. But in their late conversation Aldham had ranged the positive consequences very clearly before her. Not what his relation to her enabled her to avoid, but what it made incumbent upon her to undertake—the thought of obligations rather than safeguards—these began to impress Mary Crookenden. And to fulfil those obligations conscientiously, it appeared to her she was called upon to make a very clean sweep of some interesting episodes of the past.

And so, about half way across the pleasant open hillside, the great network of wooded valleys lying below, carrying the little silver coffin, or shrine—

which was it?—Mary left the grass path, and went up over the heather to the edge of the cliff. There she sat down, on a mossy spot amid the heath, threw aside her hat, and paused, watching.

Along the extreme verge, just here, grow some leggy tufted furzes; their stems for ever shaken by the draught sucking up the cliff face from the beach, nearly three hundred feet below. Their rounded heads are clipt as close by the wind as by any pruning-hook, still they flower. They were now packed thick and close, a blaze of rich yellow blossom scenting the air with that luscious yet cleanly sweetness which seems compact of summer and sunshine and fruitful warmth. Mary sitting there saw, framed and crossed by their pale, polished, many-eyed stems and masses of bloom, the vast plain of water—translucent green here in shore, growing bluer, more opaque and solid for every added hundred yards of distance. The mist had risen, and immediately opposite Tabery Point and the land on the far side of the bay lay along the horizon, in shape like a huge lilac crocodile, outstretched head and wavy knotted crest, floating asleep upon the confines of that turquoise sea. Rounding the point, a mere black dot amid the blueness, an outward-bound ocean steamer; the smoke from its funnel rising in a tall upright column, and then, caught by some stronger current in the upper air, trailing back and back horizontally in long fine wisps across miles of sky. The tinkling treble of the streams came faintly from the valleys behind; the deeper note of the waves, breaking slowly, singly, along the coast reached her in rising and falling

cadence from the beach beneath; and, deeper note still, the ceaseless sullen beat of surf on the far-away bar at the head of the bay. The jackdaws still chattered, the cuckoo called.

For a while Mary watched and listened. Here was fit place for the performance of funeral rites, calling the serene and ample peace of sea and sky to witness that they were duly performed—that she, rooting out of her heart all thought of any other lover, gave herself wholly, without compromise or reservation, to the man whose wife she had promised to be. And the intention was unquestionably a right and pure one, under whatever fantastic garment of outward ceremony she might elect to clothe it. The intention, yes—but the event? Ah! the event, dear reader, in Mary's case, as in yours and my own, was determined ages ago, written in the stars. Destiny—which is but a poetical name for the great chains of inevitable cause and effect which link indissolubly the whole course of human history—Destiny shapes the event, and so for it we are rarely responsible. All, I think, that is asked of us is, that our effort be towards the best we know or can picture on the narrow lines between the shackling chains—the very narrow lines whereon we are granted to show what spirit we are of by exercise of free will.

And so Mary, carrying out her quaint parable in action, untied the ribbon binding the silver box and raised the lid. Within lay the halves of the broken china monster, benignly grinning dog Toh, symbolizing much. She contemplated him musingly, and that which he symbolized arose and cried to her. The

handsome hands that had broken him in two, right across his sacred middle. Colthurst's hour of weakness and misery; Colthurst's strange passion of what he had himself prayed might prove but hopeless love; Colthurst's genius, the fierce, lurid rush and glamour of it; Colthurst's dominating vitality, the current of which had seemed, at moments, to flow out from him and pass into her, awakening, inspiring her, soliciting, almost compelling her to sail forth, even as the outward-bound steamer there, with its far-trailing smoke-wreaths was sailing forth into the wonder, and freedom, and delight, and swift-sweeping danger of the limitless ocean. And, as she thought of all this—her eyes fixed on the smoke-wreaths, lengthening and still lengthening as the vessel sped further and further from the sleeping lilac land into the open west—the nostalgia of which Colthurst had once spoken to her, that terrible ache of home-sickness for the essence of all that earth, all that nature, all that art, all that the strong working of man's spirit in the throes and languor of love have to give, encircled and possessed, and, in a sense, dissolved Mary Crookenden. She knew what it is to have the heart poured out like water by an agony of longing—longing undefinable, yet all-embracing, longing, as it seems, for recovery of a good once ours, lost we know not where or when, but lost, alas! lost. And so the girl flung herself face downwards in the heather, now in the fulness of her womanhood as in her childhood years ago, with an outburst of passionate weeping; while the sunshine kissed her golden head, and the soft breeze whispered around her, and the tough-stemmed furzes along the

cliff edge, that have valiantly braved the tempest of so many winters, shuddered with small dry rustlings and tickings of pity, as one might suppose, at sight of this tempest of human grief.

There are several stages in a real big cry, as every woman knows. Mary passed through them all. First she cried from that desperation of indefinable longing. As second stage she cried herself very lonely, ill-used, desolate, without a friend in the world; then cried herself tired; cried herself dull and indifferent; finally cried herself a trifle ashamed, poor child.

It was in this last stage that she raised herself, kneeling in the heath, tied the ribbon round the box again, not without a movement of petulant anger towards the beningnly grinning monster within and all that he symbolized, leaned over the cliff-edge, clasping a furze stem for safety's sake in her left hand, and threw Toh and his silver coffin over and down.

The tide was nearly high. Single waves broke lazily, creaming up, one by one, in among the purple-grey boulders. The silver box, a point of white light, turned and spun in the air in falling; dropped into the smooth green back of an in-rolling wave, with a flop just audible to the girl watching from the cliff top far above.

Mary rose immediately to her feet. That was done. She had cast away all that James Colthurst had been or come near being to her. Cast away, too, her artistic aspirations, aspirations after independence and emancipation. With Bohemia and all that term may stand to cover—its splendid efforts after the ideal, its bitter, even sordid experiences of the real,

its fiery thoughts, its great swelling words, its obvious lapses of taste, its uncertain levels in matters social, its reckless extravagance of emotion, its heroically perpetual, pathetically futile race after the fabled pot of gold which stands at the base of that lovely, delusive rainbow we call romance—with all this she would have nothing more to do. She had buried all this in the sea; bade the blue-green water hide it away under sand, and seaweed, and rounded boulders; wash out the very remembrance of it. Henceforward the cultivated well-bred gentleman to whom she had plighted her troth, his interests, his occupations, his tastes, his home—that fine old place in Midlandshire—society—the thousand and one daily duties which wealth and an influential position bring along with them—these should fill her time, her mind and heart. Mary told herself she had acted wisely, rightly, done that which was safest for all parties concerned.

So she wiped her wet eyes, tidied herself up a little, brushed fragments of moss and twig off her gown, pinned on her hat; glancing as she did so at the wide, bright horse-shoe of the bay, at the buff sand-hills and white splash of a lighthouse and the tide-river working its way back among the hills, at the long, lilac line of the opposite coast, at the thin floating smoke-wreaths still marking the track of the steamer. The steamer itself was unseen. It had sailed out into the dusky rose of the sunset—reflections from which were beginning to tinge all the western sea—down over the edge of the world. And Mary was glad it had disappeared; for notwithstanding her conviction

of the wisdom of her conduct, notwithstanding that she had just buried all wild desires in the flowing tide, the thought of that outward-bound vessel still raised a dangerous lump in her throat.

So to avoid all provocation of further outbursts of feeling, of regret for Might-have-been—that cruel, haunting phantom who, to so many of us, so sadly mars all that Is—she set her face homewards, trying hard to think of something very much else—tried to think for instance of Mrs. Crookenden's house-party.

Every one would be arriving just about now. It must be very nearly seven o'clock—the hour one always arrives at Brattleworthy, leaving Waterloo by the eleven o'clock train. Lady Alicia and Violet had come on Wednesday; but Mr. Winterbotham was unable to get away till the end of the week. He and Mr. Duckingfield—sometime an Indian Commissioner, now member for the Yeomouth Division, a widower, supposed not to be unwilling to make another matrimonial venture in the solid and amiable form of Adela Crookenden;—Mrs. Carmichael and her second daughter; Mr. Evershed, a clerk in the Foreign Office; and little Freddy Hellard, one of Lord Combmartin's younger sons on leave from Sandhurst, were all coming this evening in company with Lancelot. Tiresome people! Mary wished them anywhere. It was so disagreeable to face them all now just in the first blush of her engagement. People are so stupid and curious when you're just engaged. They have a way of staring at you to see where the change comes in. However, to-morrow she had promised

Cyprian to go over to Beera, and spend Easter Sunday with him. It would be rather nice, at all events as enabling her to escape curious eyes. On Monday she must encounter them all, for the Rector had promised to dine at Slerracombe House. And when would she see Lancelot? Mary felt a wee bit aggrieved by Lancelot. She had written him really the very nicest of notes announcing her engagement; telling him it would never make any difference, that he always would be, as he always had been, the very dearest of cousins—and he had not answered it. It was vexatious of him not to have written. Having heard from him and got that over would have made meeting him much easier, much less awkward.

Mary's thoughts lingered round Lancelot, as she went slowly down over the sunny heath, white scuts twinkling away to right and left, as the rabbits—out for their supper and evening game of play—scurried off into their burrows. She was tired—tired with helping to decorate Brattleworthy Church all the morning for to-morrow's festival in company with the two Crookenden girls and the rather irrepressible Violet—tired by her interview with Cyprian Aldham—tired by her walk—tired by her big cry. And this sense of exhaustion, combined with thoughts of Lancelot and the sight of the scurrying rabbits, not unnaturally caused her mind to revert to a certain other big cry in which both her cousin and rabbits had played a part. She paused a few yards short of the grass path.

How funny, it must all have taken place almost exactly here! At sunset, too, when the shadows were

long, slanting, as her own shadow slanted now, right across the hillside to the clump of wind-clipt oaks on the left. There were people singing, she remembered; men from Beera Mills and young girls. And then there was the couple who followed them—the painter whom Lance had prevented her speaking to. Lance had always held the same views on that point, had always looked askance at her artistic proclivities. Well, he might be easy on that score now, anyhow, for her artistic proclivities had gone into the sea in dog Toh's silver coffin.

Mary sighed; the lump rose again in her throat.

She must think of something else.

The artist had a young woman with him who had spoken of her, Mary's, 'black nurse.' In reply he had said (how oddly it all came back to her!) 'black nurse? That's most suitably picturesque.'—He had on a check shooting jacket.

Really it was very strange that she should remember the little episode so distinctly!—Mary was quite amused at the precision of her own vision as she reconstructed the scene bit by bit.

Lance had called him a cad, and—and in speaking he stammered.

Mary gave a cry as her thought passed, in an instant, from idle musing to amazed comprehension. —The young woman had worn a grey gown. She was the woman of Colthurst's 'Road to Ruin.' The woman of the famous laughing, fearing, fateful, desperate face, whom all London had crowded to see. And the painter—her companion, the man to whom she beckoned, as he leaned, weary yet strong, fierce

even, upon the broken rotting gate—was James Colthurst himself.

A sort of panic seized Mary Crookenden. The sea had given up its dead with treacherous promptitude. Refused burial to that which she so earnestly desired to bury. Sent it back to confront her, to perplex her, to put hard questions to her uncommonly difficult of solution.

Had Colthurst known all along, or was he as innocent of a former meeting as she herself had been? She recalled her childish sensations. Repulsion and then attraction; and how often these sensations had repeated themselves in the last few months.—She had run after him along this very grass path, eager to speak to him. Did he remember that? Mary's panic had a superstitious touch in it. For it seemed to her there was something abnormal and portentous in the sudden recrudescence of this whole matter of Colthurst just when she had made so determined and honest an effort to put it from her; in the discovery that their acquaintance was of so much older date than she had supposed. That discovery agitated her, made her nervous, scared her.

And then the woman of the 'Road to Ruin'—the beckoning, grey-eyed, tragically-laughing woman, the woman whom here, years ago, she had actually seen in the flesh—what of her? Was she dead or living? And, if living, in what relation did she stand to James Colthurst now?

For a moment a spirit of jealousy, sharp-toothed and keen, invaded Mary Crookenden. But it was only for a moment. The girl's pride, and the innate recti-

tude of which we have already spoken, rose in arms against the invader, refusing it lodging and entertainment, sternly drove it out. Which was more noble than wise on the part of Miss Crookenden. For when nature speaks, even by the voice of a base unlovely passion, it is best carefully to weigh what she says. Her little remarks are very pregnant, and a summary silencing of them frequently ends by landing both yourself and others in an uncommonly tight place.

The Easter moon, large, semi-transparent, irresolute-looking, was just clearing the tops of the trees in the rectory plantation as Mary let the front gate swing to behind her and came up the oval carriage-sweep towards the house. Kent Crookenden stood on the steps of the porch, his feet a little apart, his thumbs stuck in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

The Rector had filled out somewhat, otherwise his appearance had changed but little during the lapse of the last ten years. The hot fit of the fever of life, the fit which tells on looks, tells on the general constitution both mental and physical, had been got over early in his case, and his appearance had become stationary, like his thoughts, his purposes, his desires. The steady kindness of his eyes still corrected the caustic, half-contemptuous set of his thin-lipped mouth and heavy jaw. But now, as he stood watching the tall, white figure of the young girl coming languidly towards him across the heart-shaped grass-plot between the dusky rose of the dying sunset and growing silver of that large irresolute moon, there was no trace of mockery in the expression of his

strongly-marked face, rather a tenderness trenching on compassion, on regret.

'Well, Miss Polly,' he said, as Mary came within speaking distance, 'I had nearly given you up for lost. Looked everywhere for you here at home, and then went down to the House, where I fell into the hands of all manner of newly-arrived Philistines, male and female, whom your Aunt Caroline has collected to celebrate this church festival with her; but no one could tell me of your whereabouts. What have you been doing with yourself, eh, young lady?'

'I have been away in the deer-park seeing—seeing little ghosts, Uncle Kent,' Mary answered, smiling.

'Then you have been engaged in a most unprofitable business—a business with which young people of your age should have nothing to do.'

'We live pretty fast now,' she said, looking up and still smiling. 'We go into business pretty early now, even into the unprofitable business of ghost-seeing.'

The Rector came down the steps and stood beside the girl on the grey gravel of the carriage-sweep. His under jaw protruded rather ominously, and he questioned her upturned face shrewdly with his steady, kindly eyes.

'Polly, Polly, you have been crying. I can't have you cry, my dear, unless there is very good cause for it; and then you must tell me, and I will do my best to remove the cause.'

Mary shook her head, and laughed a little

'I have only been crying for the ghosts, she said. 'And you can't remove them, Uncle Kent, they are too intangible. They would slip through your fingers,

They do through mine. And they don't really matter,' she added, 'not a bit. It is idiotic to fuss about them. Things in general are very good to me. I have all I could ask just now; all, and a great deal more, than I deserve. And so I must needs go and cry for nothing. For the ghosts are ghosts of nothing, Uncle Kent, of unrealities, of what never has been, never could be.'

Mary shook her head, with a charming air of repudiation.

'I wouldn't have them, Uncle Kent,' she said; 'no, not at any price. But I tell you what I will have if you'll let me—that's the carriage to go over to Beera in time for morning service to-morrow. I don't care very much about braving Aunt Caroline's crowd and seeing each member of it casting about for an appropriate congratulatory speech with which to greet me. Cyprian asked me to go, and I should be glad to go—very glad, if you didn't mind my taking out one of the horses on Sunday.'

The Rector's eyes still rested questionably upon her.

'Is Aldham priest enough to lay the ghosts, Polly?' he asked.

'Yes, I think so. I feel pretty sure he is,' she answered, sweetly, gravely.

'Then you are welcome to take every horse in the stable out on Sunday, my dear.'

Chapter VI.

Dinner was over, and the gentlemen had come out of the dining-room. The company had sorted itself—rather to Lancelot's relief—broken up into groups, settled down for the evening. Lillie Carmichael was going to sing; Evershed was turning over her music, choosing a song for her. And, as he stood by Lady Alicia Winterbotham's chair drawn up near the piano, Lancelot took a survey of the rest of his guests. Really he believed every one was very tidily disposed of; only it was a nuisance Freddy Hellard made such an awful noise playing 'Pounce' with Miss Winterbotham. Lancelot looked at the boy and wondered if he ought not to go and tell him to be quiet. The Rector, Mr. Winterbotham, and Duckingfield with Adela for partner, were well into their first rubber of whist. Adela played a good, dependable game. Lancelot was glad of that, for the three men were first-rate. And it struck him that Adela really looked uncommonly well to-night.—The same thought had occurred to the member for Yeomouth. And as the latter gentleman witnessed the girl's careful judicious play, and saw the set of her fine bust and shapely shoulders above the fan of cards held in her left hand, he arrived at a definite conclusion regarding the state of his affections.

'Yes, I really am very much pleased at my niece's engagement. We all feel the marriage is such a suitable one in every respect. The announcement of it has given general satisfaction. We all feel Mary is extremely fortunate, for Mr. Aldham is so thoroughly

nice—so very superior and charming, you know. And he is extremely well-connected. His mother was one of the Northamptonshire Delanys. I should have liked you to meet him; but he is not going out just now—poor Lady Aldham's death—you knew her?'

This from the sofa, just behind Lancelot, in his mother's placid well-bred tones, accompanied by a rattle of the diamond and enamel lockets as the crochet-needle went in and out of the soft white wool.

'Dash it all, Miss Winterbotham, but you know you do cheat like the very—no—no—hold on, look here, it was an eight. It's all right—I swear it was an eight—on a nine. There's the ten—hold on, I say this is real jam,' and the irrepressible Freddy Hellard thump, thumped the cards down on the table with a splendid disregard of every one's ears, nerves, and occupations.

'I am always very pleased to hear of a girl who has been so popular and so much admired as Mary Crookenden making a nice marriage in the end,' Mrs. Carmichael said, in response to her hostess's remarks.

The rattling of the lockets ceased momentarily.—'I suppose my niece really has been a good deal admired?'

'Unquestionably,' Mrs. Carmichael replied, with the pretty lingering emphasis of her slight Scotch accent.

'Watch it a bit—why, you know you do scratch like anything, Miss Winterbotham; and—five—I'll be shot if it wasn't a five—and that ain't fair, you see, because—ace, two—oh! confound—no, I see, all right—because you know I can't scratch back.'

'Her mother was a good deal admired by some peo-

ple,' Mrs. Crookenden admitted. 'I can't pretend I ever perceived her great claim to beauty myself, but Mary is extraordinarily like her.'

'Who was she?'

'Oh! an American,' Mrs. Crookenden said, much as she might have said an anthropoid ape.

The Slerracombe drawing-room is a big room. Big enough, even when well-lighted as to-night, still to keep corners and spaces of warm shadow through which the backs of the books in their tall cases show as a pleasant well-toned background to the handsome heavy furniture, the plants, screens, tall vases of cut flowers, and to the pretty women, arrayed with that expensiveness and rather lavish revelation of personal charms which characterizes English evening dress. And it was about one of these shadowed corners that Lancelot's eyes lingered while his mother thus complacently discussed and disposed of the question of Mary Crookenden's engagement.

He had had no opportunity of seeing anything of Polly as yet. The duties of hospitality had kept him busy; and both yesterday and to-day she had been over at Beera. At dinner she sat at his mother's end of the table. Lancelot knew he must speak to her—longed to speak to her—about that same matter of her engagement. Yet dreaded doing so. The goodly youth feared he should make a muddle, and end by saying things best left unsaid. But there she was sitting on the other side of the room alone with Carrie. Perhaps it would be wisest to go and get it over. Every one was provided for. Lady Alicia was talking to Evershed.

But just as Lancelot set forth, Mrs. Carmichael stopped him with a question. He answered it. Set forth again only to encounter Violet all dimpling smiles, in a pink china silk and *mousseline de chiffon* frock which set off her downy ripeness to perfection.

'Oh! how quite too delightful for words,' she cried. 'You're coming to play "Pounce," Mr. Crookenden?'

Lancelot shook his head. 'No, indeed I'm not,' he said, good-temperedly.

'Oh, but indeed you are. I know you are. Move, Mr. Hellard. Make room for your cousin. Three-handed "Pounce" is quite the most thrilling game in the whole world.'

'Yes, come along and play, old chappie,' put in the lively Freddy. 'You don't look quite fit somehow to-night, and this festive little gamble as conducted by Miss Winterbotham would brighten you up, dear boy. 'Pon my honour it would. Just hold on and try.'

But Lancelot evinced no relish for such brightening up; he advanced resolutely upon the shadowy corner, a sort of sinking within him as though he were advancing upon an enemy's battery, the guns of which might open on him at any moment. And so they did open; but it was his sister Carrie, not Mary, who applied the portfire.

'Oh! Lance, do come and see Polly's engagement ring,' she exclaimed by way of greeting, holding up her cousin's hand for inspection.

For though Carrie Crookenden was a good girl, kind-hearted and estimable, she did not possess the gift of tact. Indeed if an unfortunate subject was within a conversational mile of her you might be

assured she would light upon it with disastrous certainty and despatch. She was a born blunderer. The blunderer, as a rule, while inflicting much misery upon others escapes with a whole skin himself. But it was not so with Carrie Crookenden. For later, at some moment useless alike for avoidance or reparation —usually just as she was getting into bed—she would see what she had done, see it with horrid clearness. Then would lie awake half the night, hot and wretched, in a fever of worry; only to come down to breakfast next morning, the embodiment of solid, buxom, physical well-being, and fall into a precisely parallel error of speech and perception before she had finished her first cup of cream and hot water. For Carrie always drank cream and hot water. Once she had had an attack of heartburn, which so astonished and agitated her that from that celebrated day forward she refused ever to touch tea. But there is a species of heartburn, alas! from which even the most rigorous diet of cream and hot water will not save even the slowest-witted, kindest-hearted, most humble-minded and healthy of maidens; and from an acute attack of that species, Carrie was suffering to-night. Nobody knew anything about it, but Carrie herself. Cyprian Aldham had long appeared to her as a sacred being. She worshipped him—from afar; would have been almost shocked indeed, had he descended from the remote, celestial region in which she supposed him to dwell, and taken any particular notice of her. She was not therefore jealous of her cousin. She acknowledged Mary's superiority to herself in looks, in intelligence in most matters. But the

thought of Mary's engagement to the god of her idolatry excited and dazzled what of imagination she had. She looked at her cousin with a touch of awe. Her position and prospects were glorious, unique. And so, lost in wonder, poor Carrie blundered with more than her habitual success to-night; saying to Lancelot—

'Do come and see Polly's engagement ring. Mr. Aldham gave it her to-day. And there's an inscription inside it in Greek, about never parting, you know, never, for ever and ever. The words come round, don't they, Polly, whichever way you read them. I think that's so beautiful, I like it so much, don't you, Lance? May I take it off to show him the inscription?'

Mary was leaning back in the corner of the sofa. Her eyes were half closed. She drew away her hand gently.

'No, you mayn't take it off to show Lance or any one. It must stay where it is, Carrie.'

'For ever and ever?' the girl inquired, with a kind of veiled enthusiasm.

'Oh! yes, I suppose so,' Miss Crookenden said.

Lancelot sat down on the arm of the sofa, just behind his sister; and his sister was exceedingly fond of him in her own quiet, undemonstrative fashion. She derived a great deal of pleasure from his proximity now. It tended to comfort her; though Carrie in her humble simplicity hardly owned she stood in need of comfort. On she blundered.

'For ever and ever—that's so beautiful. I should care for it more than all the pearls outside, though

they are so lovely, if I were Polly'—but here the speaker grew hot, fearing she had not been quite delicate, had taken on rather. So, to make matters better, she added—'Wouldn't you, Lance?'—and then hastened to change the subject. 'I was thinking at dinner you'll have to give Polly away, won't you, Lance? Of course Uncle Kent will marry her, and so you stand next. It—'

'Sara Jacobini will give me away. I have settled all about that,' Mary announced, just a trifle quickly.

'Oh! dear, will she? Isn't it rather odd to have a woman give you away? I think Lance would be much nicer.'

Carrie looked reproachfully at her cousin, and rubbed her bare shoulder gently against her brother's coat-sleeve in sign of friendliness. She was hurt for Lance. She did not like him to seem left out in the cold like this.

'It is often done now,' Mary asserted. 'People are continually given away by their mothers, and I am sure Sara has been more than most mothers to me. It is a very reasonable custom.'

'Oh! well, still I think Lance would be much nicest!'

Mary could hardly repress a movement of irritation. Really Carrie was ingeniously inconvenient.

But now Miss Carmichael was singing. Her fine mezzo-soprano has a natural tremor in it which is decidedly moving. She had selected a moving song moreover. Gounod's setting of those three short verses by a modern writer in which threefold love—love of lovers, love of nature, love of God—finds as

pathetic yet as simple and chastened expression as in any verses, perhaps, in our English tongue.

> 'Oh! that we two were Maying,
> Over the fragrant leas;
> Like children with young flowers playing
> Down the stream of the rich spring breeze.'

sang the young voice. And Lancelot, sitting sideways on the arm of the sofa, listened with a certain tightening about the muscles of his throat. And Carrie listened, not venturing in her innate humility to give the words a personal application, but thinking how wonderful and sweet it must be to be Mary Crookenden, such a ring on her finger, and such prospect of sacred companionship ahead. While in Mary herself, thanks to the inherent perversity of things, the song reproduced some touch of the terrible nostalgia she had suffered watching the outward-bound steamer two days ago. Her eyebrows drew together, and her face grew hard. For she believed that nostalgia to be unlawful, a temptation to be resisted and conquered.

'Oh! that we two, oh! that we two were Maying'—repeated the young voice.

Is it not, after all, a little too bad to let poetry and sentiment loose on one thus, after dinner, in the well-ordered drawing-room of a country house? The young people present have poetry and sentiment in plenty anyhow, in the mere fact of their youth, sex, and good looks or the reverse—for plainness may afford basis of poetry as well as beauty—without any outside adventitious assistance. And for the rest of us, why, in heaven's name, galvanize into activity just all that which, youth being past, it is so much

safer neither to feel nor think of since the future will afford it no legitimate opportunity of exercise? By forty, if we are decent, reputable persons, the limbs of what I may call the body of our affections will be mostly afflicted with paralysis. And it is a gratuitous barbarity to awaken convulsive semblance of life, convulsive jerkings and tinglings, by passing any poetic-emotional electric current through them. Better far let them rest inert and nerveless under whatever covering, reason, philosophy, or even dull-souled custom may have succeeded in spreading over them.

So, anyhow, thought Kent Crookenden, at the whist-table, when hearing the upsetting words and voice. He lost a trick, indeed, in the effort to repress such involuntary jerkings and tinglings, while he became curiously conscious of the weight of the old miniature which for so many years had hung around his neck. Mr. Duckingfield, too, suffered disturbance of mind and lost not a trick, but sight of his partner's fine bust and amiable countenance above the fan of cards held in her hand—seeing, instead, a grave, far away, beneath the glare of Indian sunlight; the grave of the girl who, as little more than a boy himself, he had loved and won, had watched droop in the fierce heat and had laid to rest beneath the sands of the 'Land of Regrets.' Even the harness of officialism, in which Mr. Winterbotham's timid hopelessly respectable spirit so long had clothed itself, gave a little at the joints. He cleared his throat, fingered his cards, peering through the lights and shadows of the large room at his wife away there by the piano. The music made him uncomfortable,

though he never had been, had not a notion how to go 'a-maying.' Possibly Lady Alicia had some notion though, for her small mouth set very close. She tried not to remember a lad in the Guards who had come to Whitney with her brother Shotover the autumn before she married—not to remember a certain luncheon out of doors, on the southern side of one of the great pheasant coverts,—Lord Denier, a former Sir Richard Calmady—the present man's father—a lot of gentlemen were there, and—Lady Alicia went no further along the path of reminiscence, but arranged the *pointe dc Venise* frill on her left sleeve. Perceived a little tear in the lace. Really Conyers was not half such a good maid as Dashwood had been. It was annoying of Dashwood's mother to die, and her father to want to have her at home!—Mrs. Carmichael had her thoughts too. Evershed even had his; for the voice was so sadly sweet that he began to wonder if the singer could be troubled by memories, could have ever entertained a fancy for another than his highly desirable self? Such an idea was a little too obviously absurd however; he rejected it with contemptuous incredulity, telling himself he must really be uncommonly far gone if it came to such wonderings as that.

Only Mrs. Crookenden's crochet needle went back and forth unconcernedly through the white wool, while the lockets jangled; and Mr. Freddy Hellard's vernacular broke in, discordant, upon the magic of the song.

'No, why? oh! I say it's too bad to go cavorting around with two kings in that way, Miss Winter

botham.' A series of vigorous thumps on the table, an outburst of very whole-hearted, boyish laughter. 'No, you don't—you bet you don't—not this time, not by a long chalk, Miss Winterbotham.'

Lancelot rested his hands on his sister's plump shoulders.

'Look here, Carrie,' he said. 'I should be no end grateful to you if you'd go and stop Freddy making that awful row.'

Carrie was not a person of infinite resource. She wanted to please Lancelot, but she also wanted to stay here by him; her heart warmed under that delightful brotherly caress.

'I don't know how to stop him,' she said.

'Tell him he shall have the monkey he wants if he's a good boy and keeps quiet for the rest of the evening.'

'The monkey—I don't understand.'

'Freddy will, though, fast enough. Stay there a little do, and keep him quiet.'

Carrie rose reluctantly from her place.

'I'll tell him of course,' she said. 'But I am sure he'd much rather have a bull-dog, and I don't believe they'll let him keep a monkey at Sandhurst, so I'm afraid it will be no good.'

'Oh that we two lay sleeping
Under the churchyard sod!'

Lancelot slipped off the arm of the sofa into the place just vacated by his sister. He did not wait to hear the end of the verse, fearing the grip on the muscles of his throat might grow a trifle too tight for

coherent speech if he did. He crossed his legs. Clasped his hands round one knee. Stared fixedly at the crinkles of an orange and black silk sock around his ankle.

'It's quite true then, Polly,' he said. 'You and Aldham have made it up?'

Now between the emotional effect of the song, Carrie's blunders, and another feeling, the result of two days spent almost exclusively in Mr. Aldham's company—a feeling which she was anxious not very carefully to analyse—Mary was slightly on edge. It is a fallacy to suppose that suffering breeds sympathy. Very frequently it breeds something of a diametrically opposite kind. A sense of your own ache makes your neighbour's ache appear a trivial affair, an irritating affair, almost an impertinence and intrusion.

'Yes, I wrote and told you so last week.' Mary paused, moved her foot, altering the folds of her skirt. 'I think you might have taken the trouble to answer my letter, Lance,' she said.

'I'm not a great letter-writer, you know,' he replied in the same constrained tone. 'I'm sorry if it was rude of me not to write. But I thought you'd excuse it as we should meet soon, Polly.'

A repressed sputter of laughter from Freddy Hellard, Carrie with largely perplexed countenance, bending over him trying to fathom the joke of her own just repeated doubts as to the rights of pet-keeping likely to be recognized by the military authorities at Sandhurst. And Miss Carmichael's voice, rising into passion in the last words of her song:—

'And our souls at home with God—at home with God.'

Then a hush through the room, a hush more complimentary far than applause, followed by Mr. Winterbotham clearing his throat with an effect of relief and saying in his civil, mechanical voice:—'May I trouble you to cut, Mr. Duckingfield?—my deal, I believe.' Then general conversation, by general tacit agreement I suppose not to let sentiment invade too freely, penetrate too deep.

Mary Crookenden, under cover of that rising hum of talk, scrutinized the young man nursing his knee, staring at his black and yellow silk sock. Like many other persons she was slow to learn to accept the consequences of her own actions. Lancelot was constrained with her; his constraint was natural enough under the circumstances, was, indeed, calculated to save trouble. Mary had much better have submitted to it. But she could not make up her mind to submit. She placed her hand on the seat of the sofa, leaned towards him.

'Lance, dear old boy, haven't you anything more to say to me than that?' she asked rather plaintively. 'Say something nice to me. I can't bear to be at sixes and sevens with you. Give me your blessing.' —Mary laughed a little nervously.—'And tell me, Lance, tell me you don't mind much.'

'I don't see the use of telling lies, exactly—' and there Lance stopped.

'Oh! no, of course not! But promise you won't detest me for—for it.'

'Don't talk rot, Polly,' he said almost roughly.

That song had made him feel 'awfully badly.' He

wished he had stayed over by Lady Alicia.

For a moment Mary debated whether it would not be justifiable and convenient to be angry, intimate he had mislaid his manners, sail away loftily across the room. But she was not particularly happy, and it occurred to her happiness was hardly likely to be increased by quarrelling with so old a friend as Lancelot. She became explanatory.

'Indeed it is best for all of us,' she said. I can't go into the ins and outs with you, that is impossible. But, Lance, if I could, if you knew the whole business from beginning to end, I am sure you would see I have done what was wisest, what was right. I was getting into muddles—' Mary hesitated. 'You must take my word for it, Lance, it is best as it is. And so you must try—you will won't you?—not to mind. Promise to try to forget—and get over it. I shall be miserable if I think you are fretting. Indeed it isn't worth fretting about. Promise to try to get over it, there's a dear, Lance.'

'Oh! I can't promise that.'

Lancelot set his teeth, told himself not to be a selfish fool, saw that Lillie Carmichael was making room for Carrie at the piano—there would be no more songs, then, he was glad of that. Carrie had lessons every year when the family went up to London. She was working her way through Beethoven; each year she added, with much conscientious labour a sonata or two to her *répertoire*. She plunged now into the last learned. Her playing was ponderously correct, grandly dull. Meanwhile emotion picked up her trailing skirts and fled. Carrie had a fine power

of depriving a composer of all pathetic and agitating qualities. Therefore Lancelot found assistance in his sister's performance at this juncture.

'But you know you mustn't bother about me, Polly,' he said presently. 'This is just one of the chances of war. People can't make themselves not care when they do care, any more than they can make themselves care when they don't. All that takes you from the outside, if you know what I mean. You can't avoid it; but it doesn't matter.'

He unclasped his knee, leaned back in the far corner of the sofa, and smiled at his cousin, the tender, sweet-tempered, half-amused expression back in his pleasant face.

'I beg your pardon, Polly, I ought to have answered your letter; for it was awfully good of you to write like that, at once, yourself. And Aldham's a splendid fellow'—again Lancelot stopped, the amusement waned somewhat, but he did not lower his eyes. —'He's loads of brains. He'll be able to give you what you want. I am awfully glad you are going to—to marry a man I admire as much as I do him.'

The goodly youth congratulated himself. It seemed to him he was pulling through very fairly well after all.

'I was half afraid you'd got rather into muddles,' he went on. 'I felt that somehow.'

Lancelot crossed his legs again, held his right ankle in his left hand, presenting his cousin with a fine view of a pointed-toed shoe sole.

'And, don't be vexed, Polly, but I couldn't help

fancying that beastly old drawing-school went for something in the muddles.'

Mary raised herself from her pretty, pleading, explanatory position, and leaned back in her corner of the sofa.

'Of course it was awfully stupid, but to tell you the truth, I'd got into a horrid fright about that fellow Colthurst. I didn't a bit like your getting so mixed up with him. I'm tremendously glad, all round, you're out of all that.'

Miss Crookenden made an effort to hold her tongue. But the effort was unsuccessful.

'It is too bad,' she said, 'the way all my friends, you and Sara, everyone, make such a dead set at Mr. Colthurst.'

'Well, he is a bit of a bounder, you know, Polly,' Lancelot replied, in tones of gentle argument. 'I heard rather a queer story about him in a roundabout way when we were home here at Christmas.'

'What have you heard?' Mary demanded—and then she could have beaten herself for the eagerness of her own voice, the eagerness of her desire to know.

'Oh! well, it was a low sort of story—not the sort of story one cares to repeat unless there's some particular reason for repeating it. If I had seen Madame Jacobini alone that day—the day—you know—we drove together'—again Lancelot stopped. 'I meant to have spoken to her about it. But as you're quit of the man and his school there's no object in repeating it. I don't see the fun of turning over a muck heap unless one's obliged to. And the man's affairs

are no earthly business of mine, now as I say you're quit of him.'

This time Miss Crookenden did succeed in holding her tongue. A silence, therefore, between the two cousins, Carrie pounding away, meanwhile, charging a *rondo* marked *capricioso* in the style of a squadron of heavy dragoons. Suddenly Lancelot asked:—'There aren't two painters of the name of Colthurst, are there, Polly?'

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Ah! exactly. He is the one then. I didn't want to do the man an injustice.'

'I say, Lance, all fair and square, *bonâ fide* offer, no deception?' and Freddy Hellard perched on the end of the sofa.

'If you keep quiet,' Lancelot said.

'My dear fellow, I am keeping quiet all I know how—have been all this blessed evenig. It was Miss Winterbotham made the row, not me. 'Pon my honour it was. Miss Crookenden, tell him it was—you believe me, don't you?'

Mary smiled an answer. She was not thinking about Master Freddy. She was putting two and two together, as the saying is; trying to make them five, fearing that in point of fact they make four. But Freddy was unaware of this. He was usually shy at Miss Crookenden. Her smile mitigated his timidity. He was also extremely jubilant at the prospect of paying his debts, without having recourse to an angry father. He became confidential.

'Between ourselves Miss Winterbotham's frightfully volatile. She is a gay goer, is Miss Winter-

botham. You bet, she can make things hum, that girl can. I have been casting an affectionate prophetic eye, Miss Crookenden, over this dear old chappie's future, when he runs in double harness with her and —holy blazes, Lance, what are you up to?'

For Lancelot had caught hold of the boy, whipped him off the end of the sofa, laid him face downwards across his knees, gently but resistlessly pinioned his arms at his sides.

'Don't be an ass, Freddy,' he said.

'But it's perfectly true, Cousin Caroline's been telling—let me up—ask him to let me up, Miss Crookenden; I shall have a fit in half a minute—telling my respected parents and all the family—ugh—about the double harness for the——'

Lancelot bumped the boy's elbows together behind his back.

'Be quiet, Freddy,' he said.

'But—oh! I say—how can I be quiet when you get bear-fighting like this? It's a beastly shame. He wants to cut me out of those few dollars, Miss Crookenden. But I'm not covetous. I'll speak the truth at the risk of—stop him, stop him, he's murdering me.—She was just mad, Miss Crookenden, when he wouldn't come and play "Pounce." Her eyes snapped like—ugh—confound it, you are strong, old chap.'

The whist players finished their rubber. A movement at the table, discussion of obscure points of play, counting of gains and losses—then the Rector came over to the sofa. 'Are you ready to go, Polly?' he asked.

Mary was more than ready. The evening had not been an altogether successful one. She made her adieux to the company. The Rector and Lancelot followed her into the hall. The distance from the house to the rectory is quite short, and as the night was fine Mary and her uncle proposed walking home. This necessitated a certain amount of wrapping up. Lancelot helped his cousin into the sea-green *cache-misère,* with which the reader is already acquainted, gave her the white lace scarf for her head, hunted under the billiard table, which stands in the centre of the hall, for the pair of overshoes to protect her feet.—They had been kicked some way underneath the table, and Lancelot had to go on all fours to find them. But when found, he did not offer to put them on for her, he let her do that herself; for notwithstanding his solicitude for her comfort, there was an element of reserve in Lancelot's helpfulness to-night when it came to close quarters. And she barely thanked him. She was still trying to assure herself two and two may make five, still seeing four stand uncompromisingly at the foot of the column. The Rector stood buttoning his overcoat, talking to Lancelot; but Mary paid little heed to their conversation. That story about Colthurst—she wanted to hear it, wanted not to hear it; wanted, above all, not to want to hear it. What was Colthurst to her, or she to Colthurst? As Lancelot said she was quit of the man, his affairs were no concern of hers; it was foolish, treasonable to think of him, and yet—yet—

'I'm going up to town with this young lady to-morrow: very likely I may not be back before you

leave. But if you think of anything more, estate business, and so forth, we ought to talk over, send me a line and I will meet you at Plymouth on my way back. You have quite decided to sail from there, rather than from Tilbury, have you not?'

'Yes, I think so. You see, it'll give me another day with my mother; and I'm afraid it will be rather a—well, a shock to her any way. And Ludovic Quayle joins the boat at Plymouth, I find.'

Mary looked up from her galosh. It was so tiresome to put on. The muslin and lace frilling in the hem of her dress would get into the heel of it.

'Sail? Where are you and Mr. Quayle going, Lance?' she asked, quickly.

'Oh, well to Bombay first of all, I suppose. I've rather a fancy for Kashmir and Thibet,' the young man answered simply and cheerily. 'I should like to have a shot or two at those jolly big sheep—*oves ammon,* don't you know, Polly, with the thundering great horns—before the Indian sportsmen have cleared them all out. And there are some pretty tidy mountains out there with unpronounceable names I should rather like to have a try at.'

Mary let her galosh be, ceased attempting to make two and two into five. The expression of her fair face was startled, humbled, looking out from those swathings of white lace.

'I shall have an awfully interesting time, I expect,' Lancelot added.

'But, oh Lance, why are you going?'

The Rector had moved towards the door, which the footman held open.

'Come along, come along, Miss Polly,' he said. 'Have a little consideration for a stingy man who has lost money at cards, and wants to get home to the consolations of his books and his pipe.'

'Shall you be away long, Lance?'

'Oh, well, that depends. For as long as Uncle Kent's willing to take over all my business for me. He's awfully good to me, you know, Polly. A year or two, I daresay.'

The Rector wished history would not repeat itself. —'Not that I had the lad's good looks any more than I had his fortune to offer Mary Coudert,' he thought. —The little miniature seemed to drag at the black ribbon round his neck. He went on down the steps. —'Lancelot takes his misfortune very well,' he said to himself.—'He will not let it break him as—' the Rector sighed a little as he stepped out into the broad silver of the moonlight—'as I let the same misfortune break me.—Polly,' he called rather huskily, 'Polly, come along, my dear.'

Mary ran down the steps after him, accompanied by rich rustle of voluminous skirts; and, Cinderella-like, dropped her slipper—that same but half-adjusted galosh—in her flight. And the young prince, as in the dear old story, saw it, picked it up, forestalling the action of the footman, and strode after her.

'Here, I say, Polly,' he cried. 'Stop half a minute. You must put this on. It's not safe for you to walk home in those thin shoes.'

And he knelt down on the loose, shingly gravel of the carriage drive in front of her.

'There, hold up,' he said cheerily.

Mary could not find anything to say to him just then, somehow. But she held out her foot—heard the sleepy grunt of a buck from inside the railings of the deer-park, the trample of the surf on the bar, the sound of Kent Crookenden's receding footsteps. Turned to see if he had gone far, nearly lost her balance in so doing, standing crane-like on one leg. Stretched out her hand to save herself, found it light on the nearest object capable of affording support—the top of Lancelot's round black head.

Men, even the better bred among them, in their relation to women are divisible into two classes—those who take advantage of such small accidents, slips, misadventures, and those who do not. Lancelot Crookenden belonged to the latter class. For just long enough for the girl to recover her footing the black head remained still, firm as a rock, under her hand. Then the young man sprang up.

'Your shoe's right enough now, Polly,' he said, yet he was very sensible of that tight grip on the muscles of his throat again. 'You mustn't stand about. The wind cuts rather sharp round the corner of the house, though it is such a jolly clear night.'

But Mary had found what to say to him at last. And the words came, with a sense of self-abasement, of self-reproach.

'Lance, you are going away because of me. I have spoilt your home to you—darling old Lance, you must detest me—I have spoilt your life.'

'Oh! not spoilt it, Polly,' he said.

The goodly youth looked very gallant, knightly

even, notwithstanding the prose of a dress coat and immaculate shirt-front, bare-headed there in the clear chill moonlight.

'Nothing—well, except doing wrong, you know, spoils life, I think.' He stopped a minute—'And I'd rather you married Aldham than anybody, indeed I would. Don't bother about me. Only, if it wouldn't be a nuisance to you, I should be awfully glad if you would put my name in now and then when you say your prayers. I—well, I think it would help to keep me straight.'

Lancelot thrust his hands into his pockets, whistled even a little as he swung back across the gravel. Away at the head of the bay, between the misty purple of vaguely-seen sea and hills, the lighthouse shone a steady watchful and, as it seemed to the young man, a kindly eye of light.

'"Oh! that we two"—No, hang the song—'

And he ran up the steps and banged the front door to after him. Violet Winterbotham stood rosy, dimpling, downiest of dormice, ripest of cherries, in the hall.

'Mr. Crookenden, I am simply expiring for a game of billiards,' she said. 'Do come and play with me, will you?'

'Why, of course, if you like.'

'Oh! how quite too charming for words.'

Lancelot turned the balls out of a corner pocket.

'I wonder when I'd better tell my mother,' he thought. 'I'm afraid it's rather rough on her. I hope she won't be very much put out.—What will

you take, Miss Winterbotham? Fifteen in fifty—or twenty-five in a hundred,' he said.

Chapter VII.

The first of May came and went, bringing James Colthurst's disciples and admirers assurance that his success had been no flash in the pan, but that he was fully equal to sustaining the reputation he had made for himself. For his work of this year was as strong, as arresting and complete, as that of last. In one respect, indeed, the new pictures were, in the estimation of many superior to the 'Road to Ruin.' There was less obvious story in them, and they were not, consequently, open to the charge of being painted literature, novels on canvas.

The larger one, 'The Chain Harrow,' shows Colthurst's talent under a fresh aspect, reminding one somewhat, in its idyllic charm and grace, of Mason. And this without sacrifice of reality. For the lithe, gay-eyed lad hanging on to the long rope reins to steady the young horse—all foam and fret—which pulls against the old horse as the two drag the glistening, jumping links of the great square harrow up over the rough pasture, is a real lad enough. He belongs to no fine fanciful age, such as that of which a famous writer on art so melodiously prophesies, wherein the whirr of machinery shall be stilled and the steam be relegated to the housewife's tea-kettle, and toil become a sort of pious pastime robbed of fatigue, dirt, and all harsh accessories; an age

wherein every one shall be content and as good as they are pretty. For the sweat stands on his ruddy face; and the rope reins only do not cut his hands because those hands are much of the texture, as they are much of the colour, of brick-bats; his leathern leggings are clogged and sticky with red earth, and the moisture of the drifting gleaming mist—mist in which the sunshine hangs as in solution, mist closing in the scene on every side—drips from the frayed edges of the old sack fastened by a greasy tag of bott-lace across his shoulders. The young horse is hot and masterful. The old horse tired. Neither to them nor to their driver—hardly controlling the one and urging the other—is the world all beer and skittles; nor even a world peopled by the charming little agriculturists and nicely-behaved beasts and birds of Miss Kate Greenaway's almanacs, or the high-souled devoutly-reverent-towards-their-betters peasants of Mr. Ruskin's reconstructed, expurgated edition of the Middle Ages. The mysterious curse, which gives life (as we know it) at once its terror and its glory, is on the land, on labour, on the cattle unwillingly obedient to bit and bridle, on the lad himself—for all his young masculine vigour—in Colthurst's picture as it has been on all such things from the dawn of history; as it will be on them—philosophies, optimistic systems, the English House of Commons and all its measures even, notwithstanding—until the end, when the book of earthly existence is written and closed at last, and the story of our race, its achievements, its disasters, fully told.

But though the shrewder members of the general

public perceived in this picture that which makes all the difference between a great work and a commonplace one, it was Colthurst's other and rather smaller painting that attracted most attention, provoked most comment, before which the crowd gathered thickest, wondered most, said least.

A cloudless evening sky—primrose fading upwards into thin crystalline green, and that again into blue—behind the downy greyish buds and crimson, white and flesh-coloured flowers of a row of tall hollyhocks bordering a perspective of narrow garden path. On the right a cottage wall—the whitewash of it discoloured, scaling off in places, defaced by nail-holes, showing the rusty red of the brickwork beneath. And, his back resting against it, sitting on a wooden bench, directly facing the spectator—his knees a little apart, his head poked forward, his loose-lipped mouth slobbering helplessly over the coarse unbleached cloth tied round his neck—a full-grown man, whose dull eyes are majestic in the depth of their pent-up incommunicable sorrow, tenderly nursing an old broken-limbed Dutch doll.

Colthurst, in moments of expansion, was fond of preaching to the young men of the Connop School on the text the power is its own best advocate.

'It is possible so to present things,' he would say, 'that even fops and fribbles think twice before they dare raise a laugh. It all comes back to a question of strength. If you are strong enough you may go naked and no one will interfere with you. And most certainly, if you are strong enough, you may present fact without a rag on, and though people will be

scared and try to hide their scare under accusations of bad taste, and will talk a large amount of long-winded rubbish about observing the legitimate limits of your art, they will not venture to smile. They may hate you. But hate does a man's reputation very little harm. Snap your fingers at hate. That which stings, that which injures, because it undermines self-confidence, is ridicule.'

And unquestionably in the case of the idiot, sitting there among the hollyhocks with the peace of the evening sky behind him, Colthurst had succeeded in so presenting his painful subject that criticism of the superior, contemptuous, patronising sort found itself grow somewhat silent and diffident. The dumb knowledge of degradation, of alienation from all sweetness of common fellowship written in the creature's sombre eyes; the instinct of love, love denied possibility of natural expression, shown in the clinging action of its monkey-like hands about that battered wooden idol of a doll, raised the conception to a plane of tragedy where, as with the fabled head of Medusa, increase of horror becomes, in a sense, only increase of beauty.

It is unnecessary to state that Miss Crookenden heard these two pictures freely discussed during the weeks that immediately followed her return to London. But it appeared, somehow, that she was always too busy to go and see them. Affairs of the trousseau, letters returning thanks for wedding presents became imperative whenever Aldham—who spent a good deal of time at his aunt's in Eccleston Square, at this period, much to that pretty old lady's happiness—

begged her to visit the Academy with him. Miss Crookenden appeared to have lost her taste for picture galleries; new frocks carried it over the arts just now. And this slightly vexed her lover. He intended his bride to surprise Midlandshire, and her various new relations, into admiration by something beyond her personal charms and little air of society. He was more than willing that delightful and somewhat exclusive county should be impressed by his wife's smartness. But he intended that it should be impressed by her intelligence and accomplishments as well. He intended it should fully realise that he had married a very clever woman. He thought it right to set his intentions clearly before her, therefore, one morning when it struck him the frivolous was gaining rather reprehensibly over the intellectual.

'I propose that our house shall be a centre of real culture,' he said to her, in the course of their conversation. 'I should like it to become noted, as certain country houses one could mention have been and are noted for the brilliancy of their intellectual atmosphere, for the excellence of the talk you hear and the character of the society you meet at them. Few women are more fitted than yourself, Mary, to be mistress of such a house; and Aldham Revel offers you an excellent *milieu*. To begin with, the house is large enough to hold a considerable number of guests comfortably. The rooms are good, and could be made much more charming at a small expenditure of taste on your part. Poor Lady Aldham's views of decoration were slightly prim and antiquated. Then the library is a really remarkable one. It contains

some valuable black-letter books and manuscripts, and a collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century memoirs, which is, I believe, almost unrivalled.'

'I am glad of that,' Mary remarked.

She was occupied in setting out a number of more or less costly offerings on a table in the white and apricot-coloured drawing-room.

'You are fond of memoirs?' Aldham asked.

'No, I don't care for them particularly, but Sara Jacobini is devoted to them.'

Mr. Aldham was one of those persons who are rarely guilty of the weakness of an exclamation. But his lips became slightly compressed. It is impossible for two people to entertain a latent dislike of each other without betraying themselves on many small occasions. Aldham had long ago discovered that his *fiancée's* companion had no special devotion towards him. He very naturally, therefore, returned the compliment by being by no means particularly attached to her. Madame Jacobini, moreover, presented a difficulty. Where was she to come in, in the new establishment? If he could have had his way he would have answered concisely—nowhere. But he foresaw that on this point his opinion and that of Miss Crookenden were not likely to be entirely at one. He therefore deferred the discussion of it to a more convenient season, and returned to the list of attractions supplied by Aldham Revel.

'The pictures will please you, too,' he said. 'My grandfather had a great taste for the English landscape school. He made a very creditable collection of Constables, De Wints, Morlands, and Callcotts. Two

of the best "old" Cromes I know hang in the little cedar drawing-room. Remind me to show you them when we go down next week.'

'Yes,' assented Mary.

Aldham remarked that—the visiting of picture galleries excepted—she almost invariably did assent. This pleased him. It was as it should be. Still he could not help noticing a certain listlessness in her tone. To-day he had brought her, on behalf of his uncle, the most costly offering of all—poor Lady Aldham's diamonds, which had been cleaned and in part reset. They glittered and flashed—a couple of necklaces, five stars, some pendants and brooches—as they rested on the purple velvet cushions of their respective cases, really a royal sort of gift for any bride to receive. Aldham glanced from them to their new owner. The woman and the jewels suited each other to admiration. He was genuinely proud of both. But an increasing longing to mould, fashion, in a sense, use the beautiful girl stirred in him. For it is incontestable that the natural man in us survives much disintegrating action of high civilisation; and a pretty strong dash of the sultan remained in this clean-shaven, fine-featured, black-coated young priest. It struck him that Miss Crookenden took both his conversation, his gifts, and the very pleasant position he offered her, a trifle too much for granted—that she seemed insufficiently sensible of the excellence of the marriage she was about to make. This nettled him slightly.

'Suppose, Mary,' he said suddenly, in that clear delicately incisive voice of his, 'suppose you leave off

arranging the presents for a little while, and give your mind wholly to our talk. I want to see you interested, genuinely, spontaneously interested in the thought of our future life together.'

'I am interested, profoundly interested,' Miss Crookenden answered. She seemed to deliberate for a few seconds. Then she moved away from the table and its display of glories, sat down near Cyprian Aldham, smiling at him very sweetly. 'Well, go on, plan it all out, give me the stage directions, teach me my part,' she said.

Aldham laughed a little with an irresistible movement.

'You are charmingly submissive, Mary. Will this most commendable and captivating attitude continue?'

'That is my desire,' Mary Crookenden said. And she said it seriously, looking full at her lover.

Would it continue? To Mary that was the most vital of questions just now. She had mentioned to Madame Jacobini six weeks ago as proof of Mr. Aldham's high eligibility, that he gave her no feelings. But he had begun giving her feelings. Notably a feeling that there was, to use a hackneyed illustration, a hand of steel within the velvet glove of his fine manner. She began to see through the covering of soft flesh to the bone, the skeleton so to speak, of Mr. Aldham's character. She found nothing indefinite, nothing flabby in the constitution of that character. She figured it to herself under the form of some well-proportioned classic building—the parts carefully adjusted, every stone in its place, a sufficient amount

of decoration to make it very agreeable to the eye, foundations, too, well planted, sunk deep. It had no secret chambers in it. It stood there orderly, finished, prepared to justify every legitimate demand; presenting itself fearlessly, proudly, arrogantly almost for observation. But it had not grown, it had been made. It was the result of effort, the result of tradition, of circumstance. Every building, unless actually ruinous, is capable of conversion into a prison, if needs be. And the feeling grew on Mary that the handsome building of Cyprian Aldham's character was very capable of conversion into a prison for Cyprian Aldham's wife. To be happy with him you must conform to his tastes, his wishes, his intentions—how very often, by the way, that phrase 'I intend' was on his lips? And would she be able to conform and thus secure happiness Mary hoped so, hoped so honestly. She acknowledged to herself she had made a convenience of Aldham's affection for her. She admitted she was under an obligation to him on that account. This made her scrupulously anxious to please him, scrupulously anxious to conform. And so she answered with a kind of serious playfulness now: 'That is my desire.'

'Very well, then, you will enter into my scheme of making our house something by itself, a point of light in the rather foggy intellectual atmosphere of Midlandshire. Without vanity, I think I may say that I am of rather different calibre to the ordinary hard-riding country squire, as you are of very different calibre to his wife. And we must not permit ourselves to sink into the prevailing level, Mary. Per-

haps in saying that I overstep the limits of probability. But even short of sinking to the level of our good neighbours, we might allow ourselves to deteriorate. *Entre les aveugles un borgne est roi.* And we may be tempted to grow lazy and be content with a one-eyed royalty. We must be on our guard against that. We must be quick to note any signs of intellectual indolence. Too many women, after marriage, cease to cultivate their accomplishments. You must not do so. You must continue to read—we will read together. You must continue to paint.'

Mr. Aldham certainly had no cause to complain of lack of due attention while making this speech. For Mary sat watching him thoughtfully. And as she watched, her sense of the obligation she had incurred towards him grew very irksome to her. Paint!—the word, and she knew it, knew it every day more clearly, irrefragably, held for her the whole of a great rejected romance. In her present humour, under present circumstances, she wished never to touch a brush again. Yet there was her sense of obligation. She had not had the courage to accept that romance. She had made this man her way of escape from it. She was in his debt. Moreover, but one line of conduct would make life tolerable with him—the line of unconditional obedience. So she said:—

'Very well. I understand. Reading will be delightful, of course. And, if you wish it, I will go on with my painting, such as it is.'

'Thanks. It is very pleasant to find you fall in so completely with my views. I am all the more anxious we should keep up to the mark in these matters, be-

cause in politics we shall be compelled to lag behind. My uncle is the staunchest of Tories. He and I agree to differ, on the understanding that I also agree to be silent. During his lifetime political society—such as we should both care for—is impossible at Aldham Revel. But no embargo would be laid on our entertaining literary people and artists. Therefore I should be glad for you to maintain a connection with any acquaintances of the kind whom you may have—with rising men like Mr. Colthurst, for instance.'

Involuntarily Miss Crookenden's eyes sought the place on the mantelshelf where dog Toh had formerly been enthroned.

'Judging by the way his this year's pictures are spoken of, Mr. Colthurst is no longer a rising man. He is a very positively risen man,' she said. 'And we had better stick to the rising ones, Cyprian, I think, until we, too, have risen; until Aldham Revel is a recognised second edition of Holland House, or Strawberry Hill. A little time will be needed to make it that, even though your calibre and mine is so very different to that of our country neighbours.'

Aldham raised his eyebrows slightly. Miss Crookenden's tone had a sudden flavour of sarcasm in it; and sultans do not relish sarcasm from even the favourite light of the harem.

'My dear Mary?' he said slowly, interrogatively, restrainingly.

It was the first time her lover had ventured on rebuke. This rebuke was delivered courteously enough; yet the girl winced and started under it, as a high-mettled horse will start under the gentlest

application of whip or spur. She rose, and going to the table began arranging her presents again.

Aldham leaned back in his chair, in somewhat austere silence. In his opinion Mary was distinctly in the wrong; it was therefore her place to make an advance in the direction of peace by speaking first. Some time, however, elapsed before the young lady saw fit to speak; and then the subject she selected for conversation happened to be of a nature ill calculated to smooth ruffed plumes.

'I should be glad to arrive at a clear understanding about one matter, Cyprian,' she said, rather loftily, 'which so far has been neglected in all our plan-making. We have settled nothing about Sara Jacobini.'

Aldham rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, pressed the tips of his pointed fingers together and gazed at them with an air of withdrawnness and slight severity.

'I, too, should be glad to arrive at a definite understanding upon that point,' he observed.

'I take for granted you will not wish her to leave me.'

'That depends upon what you may mean by leaving,' he answered, slowly. 'You forget, perhaps, that you and I shall be my uncle's guests—guests on a peculiar footing which confers a good many privileges upon us, but still guests. To propose, as I proposed just now, we should ask agreeable people to stay in my uncle's house for short periods, is one thing. To offer to a man of his age and habits, as permanent inmate, a lady with whom he has not the slightest

connection, is quite another. It strikes me that in doing so we should be making a rather excessive demand upon his hospitality.'

'Pray don't suppose that I have any wish to tax Sir Reginald's hospitality by forcing my relations upon him,' Mary said quickly.

Aldham ceased contemplating his finger-tips, raised his eyes to the girl's face. The sharp edge of his nature made itself very sensibly felt just then.

'We seem to be at cross purposes. That is unfortunate,' he said. 'Perhaps it would be as well if you explained your wishes a little more definitely. I really fail to apprehend them at present.'

'My wishes are very simple—that Sara should not lose her home;that I should not lose her.'

'The forming of new ties almost invariably necessitates the loosening of old ones,' Aldham remarked, a trifle—it must be owned—sententiously.

'Then, upon my word, I am not at all sure that forming new ties is not a mistake,' Miss Crookenden cried.

Aldham rose from his chair, keeping his cold blue eyes fixed on her.

'Do you in the least realise what your words imply?' he inquired.

But here, before Mary had time to reply, the conversation suffered interruption in the agreeable form of Violet Winterbotham. That brilliant little lady entirely refused to admit that her Easter campaign had ended in defeat. Not a bit of it. It had ended in a draw; and she fully counted on resuming play on some future occasion. Lancelot Crookenden had

gone to shoot beasts and birds of sorts in Kashmir; but Miss Violet belonged to a section of society in which journeys are the rule rather than the exception. She had no doubt he would return safe and sound, all in good time; and the Kashmiree beauties gave her no anxiety. 'Mr. Crookenden wasn't *that* sort of man, you know,' she said to herself with meaning; and her meaning was a perfectly just one. In the interval she determined to keep his family well in hand; and in furtherance of this end displayed the warmest interest in the affairs of Miss Crookenden.

'Oh! I know it's too bad to interrupt you like this, darling,' she exclaimed between effusive kisses on both cheeks—'because of course you and Mr. Aldham—how d'ye do, Mr. Aldham?—must have such loads and loads of delightful things to say to each other. And it must really be quite too odious for you to have people trotting in and out, specially in the morning. But I couldn't resist. Mr. Aldham, really I couldn't. I was simply expiring to see the new presents. She's got such lovely ones, hasn't she?'

Violet gave a sharp little cry; her manner became absolutely solemn.

'Why, Mary,' she said, 'what diamonds! Who did give them to you? What—what diamonds!'

'Cyprian brought them to-day from Sir Reginald. They were Lady Aldham's,' Mary answered, coldly.

Miss Winterbotham bent down over the velvet cases; then glanced up from under her pretty fringed eyelids with a look that had nothing in the least infantine in it.

'Ah! they're family things—I see—heirlooms.'

She paused a moment, then broke forth again into innocent, overflowing enthusiasm.

'Well, I never saw anything so utterly lovely. Really, Mary, you are quite the luckiest girl in the world. Don't you think so yourself? I am sure I should. Aren't you frantically excited at having them? I should be.'—Violet clasped her hands and beamed.—'I should want nothing more in life, Mr. Aldham, positively nothing, if I possessed those diamonds.'

'Mary is not as easily pleased as you are. She regards her possessions from a very philosophic standpoint.' Aldham permitted himself to reply, as he shook hands with Miss Winterbotham.

'Ah! this is quite too dreadful. I'm driving you away?' that young lady cried.

'No, I was going in any case.'

Violet moved aside, discreetly busying herself over the wedding presents.

'I wonder if they'd kiss if I wasn't here?' she thought. 'There, Mary's going after him. I hope she'll leave the door open; I should so like to see. Perhaps they'll kiss on the landing.'

But Miss Crookenden made no offer of kissing her lover, though she approached him in a spirit of most disarming gentleness and apology.

'Cyprian, I am very sorry I have vexed you,' she said. 'Please forgive me. I spoke without thinking. Indeed, I don't want to be troublesome or disagreeable. But life seems such a hustle just now; and I get rather off my balance sometimes. See, Cyprian, to show it's all right between us and that you're not

very vexed with me, will you take me to the Academy this afternoon? I know I have been tiresome about going there and fancied I never had time. But I will make time to go there or anywhere else you like to-day. And then we've a card for a big party at Mr. Carr's to-night. I left the engagement open, meaning to shuffle out of it. But perhaps you would care for it? All sorts of people will be there—the sort of people you were talking of having at Aldham. I don't want to bother you; but I am quite ready to go, and so will Sara be, if it would amuse you at all to meet them.'

Thus did Mary Crookenden strive to make it up with Cyprian Aldham, and succeeded. For he accepted both propositions.

'And to-night,' he said, 'you will wear the diamonds, that is if you want to please me.'

'I do want to please you,' the girl answered, and her grave voice shook a little from the earnestness of that desire

BOOK VI.—SATAN AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT.

'Did I not tell you,' he said, 'that the jewel I had found was alive and that it was a woman?'—*Papuan Legend.*

CHAPTER I.

ADOLPHUS CARR flew his kite with a long string to-night. For it was his happiness to entertain, not only persons, but a Personage. A Personage before whom you bent back or knee according to your sex; or despised and envied those who did so, not happening yourself to be among the number of the elect whom the said Personage graciously delighted to honour. Mr. Carr was very much in his element. He was a born courtier. His mind, civil to the point of indirectness, was quite at its ease in the extremely artificial atmosphere in which alone Royalty can exist. Not for a moment, however, must he be accused of being a toady. The courtier is as distinct from the toady, as the high comedy actor from the buffoon; or the cultivated Anglican divine—such as our friend Mr. Aldham, for instance—from the street preacher bawling rudimentary salvation on the top of a tub. Adolphus Carr was none the less suave, none the less confidentially polite, to the rank and file of persons present because of the Personage present likewise. But he exercised a refined diplomacy in respect of them. He displayed most commendable tact in mar-

shalling them, in making them circle round the royal centre, in getting them to come and go, do and say, just all most calculated to please and amuse his royal guest.

And this was hard work. But Mr. Carr relished it. Relished, too, by anticipation—for why should we squeamishly seek to place lights under bushels when they may illuminate the hearths and homes of countless fellow countrymen if set in the great candlestick of the Daily Press?—the very laudatory notices safe to appear (he had not forgotten to invite members of their respective staffs) in the Society Papers of the week.

It was not every day Adolphus Carr entertained Royalty, and he was prepared to spare no expense. He took pains, moreover, to acquaint himself with any little tastes on the part of Royalty which it might be possible to gratify; and learning that his Hereditary Grand Duchess, in addition to her fondness for English letters and English art—which was easily enough gratified—possessed a fondness for white lilac, he loyally proceeded to turn his apartments into a garden and grove of those exquisite flowers. The night, for the time of year, was curiously hot. Three days of glorious weather appeared about to end in the thunderstorm, declared by our enemies invariably to give a playful finish to a British summer. A weight seemed to hang in the still air. And, as the hours passed and the crush thickened, the rooms, notwithstanding their height and long row of windows standing wide open on to the balcony—it had been tented in with pink and maize-coloured canvas,

matted, supplied with seats, hung with lamps—the rooms, I say, grew very much too warm for comfort, while the faint, dreamy, all-pervading scent of the lilacs became almost distressingly oppressive.

So it seemed to Mary Crookenden at least. She had made due obeisance to Royalty, introduced Cyprian Aldham to notabilities various and sundry, received congratulations without number upon her approaching marriage; and now, having escaped from the crush, stood fanning herself in one of the tall windows listening to a lively stream of talk poured forth by Antony Hammond.

'At last, my dear Miss Crookenden!' he was saying gaily. 'It seems a small eternity that I have been steering my humble barque in the wake of your very august one through this weltering sea of rank, talent, and fashion. I thought I should never come up with you.'

Hammond, it need hardly be stated, was tremendously on the alert as to the young lady's engagement. He was most curious to know how the fair taker of scalps bore herself under existing conditions. And it struck him now, that her bearing offered rich harvest of suggestion to the inquiring mind. Her dress was beyond all praise. That white cut-velvet train—Hammond always knew what women's gowns were made of—over its white silk and lace petticoat, with its rather exaggerated scalloped silk *ruche* at the bottom; those sleeves reduced to the modest limits—*pace* oh! Puritans—of upstanding white velvet bows on the shoulder; those really magnificent diamonds; the lustrous though colourless complexion; the deli-

cate brownish shading of the eye-lids—Hammond was ravished, charmed. Afterwards, when people were talking a good deal about Miss Crookenden and her doings, he greatly relished describing her appearance that night.—'A sort of glorious ghost,' he said. 'Impassive as Pygmalion's statue before the silly fellow worried heaven into conferring the doubtfully beneficial gift of life upon it. Miss Crookenden's beauty was in the grand style that night. I assure you it was absolutely prostrating.'

Immediately, however, Hammond exhibited no particular signs of prostration. He chatted away brightly enough.

'As the vulgar little boys say, Carr has "got 'em all on" to-night, hasn't he, Miss Crookenden? This is his social apotheosis. I feel quite weighed down by the greatness of the occasion, don't you? It is immense, positively immense. Somebody ought to strike a medal in commemoration of it. And you see the point of the joke is, that no halt, no pause, no lapse is allowed in the procession of incidents and attractions. The cry is still "they come." Just now a *corvée* of Irish members—very hairy—rushed in, the sitting being over or they possibly suspended for the night. A minute or two hence we shall be welcoming the actors, in their "mere capacity of man"—as the newspapers gracefully put it—and consequently very much the reverse of hairy, the performances at the theatre having concluded.'

Really the young lady's impassivity amounted to being slightly disconcerting, Hammond thought. She could hardly take the trouble to raise a smile.—'Is

she craving, perhaps, for the society of the long-coated lover?' he asked himself. He whirled the string of his eye-glass round his finger, letting his easy light-hearted glance meanwhile wander over the crowd in search of the said lover. But Mr. Aldham was not visible. Hammond applied himself to conversation once more.

'It is hot—but hot,' he remarked. 'If Carr had altogether risen to the occasion, if he was quite the perfect host he aspires to be, he would have supplied each of us with a little lump of ice to wear on our heads, like the New York omnibus horses, to enable us to bear up under this kaleidoscope of excitements combined with this sweltering night. Ah! do just notice the angularity of Lady Theodosia Pringle's curtsey to the hereditary representative of crowns and sceptres, Miss Crookenden! The aroma of an earlier and more reverent age is about it. And now—really I must say Carr keeps the ball rolling with consummate ability—now, by way of contrast, we have the very last word of modernity in the shape of that anarchic, fire-brand of a creature—high priest of just all non-strenuous souls like myself implore to be permitted to ignore and forget—James Colthurst.'

Hammond surveyed his companion again.

'Miss Crokenden, you are tired. I see it,' he said. 'You are bored. I know it. But do just oblige me by observing Colthurst behaving prettily to a Princess. There is a wealth of opposing sentiment in the situation which is delectable—very delectable indeed, if you permit your imagination to play freely

around it. Believe me it is a unique little spectacle, one by no means to be missed.'

At last Hammond thought he had hit on a subject which interested Mary Crookenden. She turned her beautiful head, languidly and proudly, it is true, and gazed across the grove and garden of white lilac, past the groups of smart people, to the open space on the other side of the room here Royalty held its little court. But as she gazed her expression softened, her eyes dilated, kindled. Hammond talked on about Colthurst, the man's singular views, his extravagant tendencies, his doll-nursing idiot, his chain-harrowing boy; and Pygmalion's sta , meanwhile, showed increasing signs of animation. So he fancied anyhow. His curiosity began to be seriously aroused.

'That wretched idiot's face is as clever, in its way, as the woman's in the "Road to Ruin,"' he went on. 'It holds a marvel of meaning. If his colouring and workmanship were not so superb, one would really be disposed to wonder whether Colthurst had not mistaken his vocation, whether he wasn't a great dramatist spoilt—'

But Hammond left his sentence unfinished. For here Miss Crookenden indulged in an odd and most unexpected bit of by-play. Drew up her hands with a quick shuddering motion ,covered her eyes with her fan.

'Ah! ah!' she cried, softly suddenly; 'he has begun to stammer.'

Then she turned away, white cut-velvet train and all, and swept out of the window into the balcony,

leaving Hammond literally with his mouth open, staring.

'Ye gods and little fishes, what is the interpretation of this?' he said to himself. He had never been more surprised in his life.

As we know, Hammond was not always very scrupulous where his curiosity was engaged, and just now his curiosity was stimulated to the highest pitch. It stood on tiptoe. Yet it appeared to him that common courtesy demanded that he should pause, give Miss Crookenden time to recover herself, that he should not do anything calculated to place her in a still more awkward predicament. He had the good taste, moreover, to extract all hint of inquiry and comment from his countenance before he followed her. When at last he did so, he tried to make as unconcerned, as light and airy, an entrance on the scene as might be.

'Yes, you are perfectly right to escape,' he said; 'those rooms are villainously, really fiendishly hot, and it is a shade cooler out here, I believe.'

The pink and maize-coloured canvas of the roofs and walls tinged the whole atmosphere of the long dimly-lighted place with a sort of amber glow. And through this, so it struck Hammond, Mary Crookenden's face showed singularly weary and care-worn, as she stood in her rich dress among the flowers with the cold brilliance of those superb jewels in her hair and upon her neck and bosom—a glorious, but really a quite uncomfortably ghostly young beauty. He had reckoned on finding her slightly defiant, as a woman usually is when she has betrayed something—Ham-

mond used that vague term, for precisely what she had betrayed he was at a loss to determine. But Mary was not defiant. He could almost have believed she was frightened.

'O! it is terribly hot,' she said. 'The heat distracts me. It makes me quite ill. Have you any idea where Madame Jacobini and Cyprian Aldham are, Mr. Hammond? Will you help me to find them? I can't stay here any longer. He must take me home.'

'I won't help you to find Mr. Aldham, because—pardon a dogmatic tone, Miss Crookenden—I won't consent to your facing those basting rooms again. But I will find himself myself and bring him here to you. Do you mind waiting?'

Mary hesitated.

'I don't know,' she said; 'I would rather go with you.'

But Hammomnd for once in his life was obdurate.

'My dear Miss Crookenden, be admonished! Don't venture into that furnace; you are evidently very tired. Sit down in the big chair yonder—you see?—right at the end. No one will molest you. They are mostly too busy staring at the Hereditary Grand Duchess; and Desborough is just beginning to recite some blood-curdling delight of a piece, which the lovers of emotion are trooping away to hear—just observe how they are all clearing out. You will be alone here and fairly cool. And it will take me precisely half the time to lay hands on Mr. Aldham if I go by myself. Find him I will, and that speedily, or perish in the attempt.'

Hammond smiled very pleasantly at the young girl.

Her pathetic face taken in conjunction with her gorgeous attire made him feel deliciously sentimental. Little verses began to come into his head. Hammond quite hugged himself over the episode. But what did it portend? What, indeed what?

Mary made an effort to smile in return, but her lips were strangely stiff. The smile was not a happy one.

'Thanks so much. Please tell him I must go,' she said. 'Tell him not to be long, Cyprian is so deliberate. And I want to go home at once—at once.'

Chapter II.

Taken fairly, along with their context, the most astonishing affairs become comprehensible enough. The difficulty is to get hold of the context; and that is just why the conduct of even the most respectable of our fellow creatures presents to us such an endless tangle of contradictions, ineptitudes, inexplicabilities, and general wrong reason run riot.

Which observations find apposite illustration in the small affairs, just recorded, which so taxed Antony Hammond's acuteness. To the one person able to supply the context—namely, Mary Crookenden—that affair was comprehensible to the point of humiliation. Precisely because she dreaded an episode of this description had she been anxious to 'shuffle out' of going to Mr. Carr's great party. Then her little quarrel with her lover had supervened. Wishing earnestly to make it up with him, to cancel their dif-

ference by presentation of some suitable peace-offering, she had defied the dread, risked the episode. And now, as she waited at the end of the balcony, the episode confronted her as an accomplished fact. She contemplated it in all its aspects and bearings; and, poor child,—poor for all her pride and fine clothing,—as she did so her heart grew heavy as lead. And unhappily she had plenty of leisure for contemplation, the wheels of Cyprian Aldham's chariot tarried most unaccountably. She could think undisturbed. For the chair to which Hammond had directed her, was shut in, hidden away behind a flowery promontory of white lilac bushes with an undergrowth of azaleas and gladiolas extending more than half the width of the balcony, and leaving only a narrow passage against the inside wall.

Mary Crookenden has retained a very lively remembrance of every detail of her vigil in that oppressively fragrant little spot. Of the six-sided red glass and brass lamp hanging in the centre, the chain of it vibrating slightly from the out draught. Of the rosy reflections cast by it upon the lilacs and azaleas. Of the slight clinging roughness—against her bare arm—of the pattern of the brocaded chair-cover, on which bunches of dim-hued carnations straggled across an ash-blue ground. Of the rich amber glow filling all the long perspective of the tented space. Of figures passing to and fro, or grouped about the windows of the brilliant rooms. Of the well-modulated murmur of conversation. Of the reciter's voice, now passionate, now appealing, rising in some declamatory passage, falling in some pathetic

one; the tones of it singularly agitating—though the words recited were indistinguishable—amid the heat, the rich subdued brightness, the cloying sweetness of flowers. And then right before her—striking a very different note—an arched draped opening on to the darkness of the river and the night. Through this, as she sat there, she could just make out the line of the opposite shore. Lights reflected down upon the oily swirling water—current flowing, tide ebbing, away together past the roar and turmoil of the city towards the freshness and silence of the sea. Buildings, towers, great chimneys, black against a vague luridness behind them thrown upward, through the close thick air, from the network of teeming streets lying back between Lambeth and Vauxhall. Over all this another blackness of gathering cloud. Cloud big with storm, boiling up from south and east, though the wind was dead still. And in Mary Crookenden's mind meanwhile, sense of disquieting self-revelation, of moral confusion; sense, moreover, that struggle with that confusion only entangled her conscience and reason more and more hopelessly, as in the meshes of some cruel net. Not right and wrong, but right and right, not truth and falsehood, but truth and truth, appeared to her sadly in conflict just then. And it was of the very essence of the case that she could seek no advice, no counsel. Acting at once as advocate for each side and as judge, she must argue the question, give the verdict, bear—perhaps—the weight of long punishment, unaided, silently, by and for herself.

Yet the episode in itself remained comprehensible

enough. She had honestly wished to avoid seeing Colthurst again, on this side her marriage at all events. Now she had seen him and her first sight of him had been alarmingly pleasant. It appeased her pride, it went to justify her past thought of him.—That word 'bounder' of Lancelot's had rankled in her mind.—For she saw that here, among all these people, Colthurst's personality remained distinct; and that not by doubtful virtue of outward eccentricity, but by positive virtue of being an undeniably telling figure. Colthurst, indeed, had sloughed off much of his outward eccentricity in the last few months. The habit of rule, sufficiency of means, the comfortable knowledge of an assured success, had increased his social self-confidence and given him ease of manner. Looking, as he looked now standing talking to Adolphus Carr's Princess, Mary Crookenden felt he was not a man whom any woman need be ashamed of going into the world with. His appearance, like his work, might provoke comment, but comment would hardly be of the patronizing, supercilious sort.

All this she perceived almost at a glance. Perceived it with an odd mixture of satisfaction and of uneasiness, knowing that she had infinitely better perceive nothing—that perceptions down these lines were dangerous, not to say wrong. Perceived it, moreover, with the glamour of those pictures of his, which she had looked at in company with Aldham at the Academy only a few hours ago, still strong upon her. For their virility, the consummate art, the large insight of them had affected her profoundly. And

then, by an unkind little accident, as she watched him, listening all the while to Hammond's half-malicious, half-laudatory talk, it fell out that suddenly, unexpectedly, the attraction of Colthurst's weakness was added to the attraction of his strength. For looking about him, in that restless way of his, during a rather involved declaration of artistic faith on the part of the Royal lady, Colthurst's eyes had met hers. He became aware of her, aware she was watching him. The whole man had changed somehow. A certain excitement shook him. He began to hesitate in answering the declaration of faith, to stammer, and that badly. And perceiving this and how it came about, a desperation of pity, of anger that he should be at a disadvantage, of longing to help him shelter him, stand between him and all possibility of ridicule, had arisen in Mary Crookenden, had made her cry out, and then, in shame and fear, had made her turn and fly. No wonder, I think, sitting alone, contemplating the episode in all its bearings the girl's heart grew heavy as lead.

Her first instinct had been to seek safety with Aldham, to get him to lead her out of temptation, to take her away. Now as she waited for him, while the air became more oppressive, the heat greater, the fragrance of the flowers more close and clinging—a presence rather than a scent—that idea of the necessity of rescue amplified itself. Not only from this place, from the subtle influence of James Colthurst's near neighbourhood, must Aldham take her; but from all her old life, its associations, its aspirations, its surroundings, its fancies—and that as soon as possi-

ble. They were to be married—why wait? Why not be married at once? Only the completion of her trousseau stood in the way. And hadn't she plenty of clothes already? What did a gown more or less matter as compared with this horrible state of moral confusion? Mary was fairly terrified. To fix the great gulf of marriage—and to a high-minded young girl that gulf happily seems a very, very great one—between herself and the man who so strangely affected and attracted her—the man who told her he loved her and made her feel the truth of that telling as no man ever had before—told her also his love was hopeless, prayed passionately it might be kept so—the man in whose life was something obscure and hidden—Lancelot's hinted story, the haunting face of the woman of Slerracombe Deer Park—to place, once and for all, between herself and this man, solemn vows ratified by a sacred ceremony; to place between herself and him the mysterious change from maid to wife;—this seemed to Mary Crookenden her only chance of peace, of a quiet mind, of a conscience void of offence.

And, as the minutes passed and still Aldham did not come, this idea of the necessity for haste, for action immediate and final, deepened in her, possessed her, worked upon her till the nervous tension became almost intolerable.

No doubt Mary's distress of mind was aggravated by physical causes, by the highly electric state of the atmosphere. For, more than once while she waited, the whole southern heaven had opened for an instant —buildings, towers, great chimneys along the further

which he became moment by moment more intimately sensible of her, there, close by, the beauty of her person enhanced by her appointments and surroundings—all this wrought on him, produced in him a distracting restlessness. To carry it off he began talking, caring little enough about the subject so long as he did talk.

'You heard, I dare say, that I ended by taking the Connop School?'

'Yes, I heard you had taken it,' Mary said.

She fanned herself steadily. The regular mechanical beat was helpful to the maintenance of self-possession. And she, too, needed help towards that end just now.

'I hope the work goes on well?'

'Oh! the work goes on well enough,' Colthurst answered with a certain impatience, still watching the upboiling cloud. 'I am weeding out the incapables by a p-process of inevitable natural selection which rather scares B-Barwell. He says I shall empty the school if I p-press the students so hard. B-but I don't agree. I shall only kill off the ones who have no stamina. And I am p-perfectly willing to do that. I have no use for rickety creatures. Art has no use for them. I am d-delighted to help them to select themselves out of existence. I r-really am doing them a kindness in helping them to disappear.'

'Poor things!' Mary Crookenden exclaimed softly, almost involuntarily.

Colthurst looked round at her. There was a curious fierceness in his expression.

'You think me b-brutal, Miss Crookenden,' he stammered.

'I don't think anything,' she answered, hurriedly, 'but that I am glad the work goes on well—that you should be satisfied.'

Colthurst gazed away up the river again. Once more the southern sky opened, and all the scene without showed clear. Whether it was only the change from the warm lamplight to that unearthly flickering pallor of the sheet-lightning Mary could not tell, but Colthurst's face seemed to her a revelation of how much sorrow a human countenance can hold. The sorrow was not showy, theatrical, obtrusive, but it was none the less penetrating for that.

'I am not satisfied,' he said. 'I longed for the school; I thought I could do a lot with it. I got it. I am d-doing a lot with it. I had my d-desire. I have leanness withal in my soul. Why not? The two things generally go together, I suppose.'

'Ah! but,—' the girl put in eagerly—she could not help it—the longing to comfort this strong, dominating aggressive being overmastered every prudential consideration—it had done so before.—'But there are your pictures. Surely you find satisfaction in them? I saw them to-day. No other pictures in the place are within a hundred miles of them. They are magnificent. They must satisfy you.'

'Of course I am p-pleased with them,' Colthurst said. 'Of course I am fond of them. Of course in a degree, I glory in them. It would be a very paltry pretence of humility to deny that. For no one can measure the worth of his work like the artist him-

self—that is obvious, I think. He only knows all that has been p-put into it. Still more perhaps all that has been p-put out of it—rejected, refused. For the best work is always built up on refusal somehow, on obedience to the "thou shalt not" even more than to the "thou shalt." B-but then, just in proportion as the work is good, complete in itself, an actual creation, it becomes impersonal—is outside of you, has an independent life. Your reason and your artistic sense acquiesce in that. Your brain is content it should be so; your ambition is gratified.'

As usual, Colthurst's nervousness had worn off under the relief of self-expression. He held himself upright, standing directly in front of Mary Crookenden, looking full at her.

'The m-man in you is satisfied, in short, he said. 'B-but alas! there is a good deal besides the man in most of us artists. There is the child—the everlasting up-springing of youth, which is at once our curse and the secret of our power. And the child isn't satisfied. The child doesn't care two raps for laborious success, the creative gift, for asquiescent reason, or gratified ambition, Miss Crookenden. It cries out for toys, for p-playfellows, for sunshine, and d-dear, silly little pleasures; a home to come back to at night when it's tired; l-loving arms to hold it; a lullaby of laughter and kisses.'

Colthurst's stammer grew somewhat unmanageable as he said the last few words. He looked down, wrenching oddly at his shirt collar.

'S-satisfied? Is anybody satisfied, I wonder?' he repeated. Then he raised his eyes to the girl's face.

'Are you satisfied, Miss Crookenden?' he asked, quite gently. 'If what one hears of your prospects is true —I hope it is—you have more cause for satisfaction than most of us. We hear you are going to make an ideal marriage—a marriage that has everything to recommend it, not a single d-drawback. Is it so?'

Mary fanned herself slowly, unceasingly. The heat seemed to her breathless.

'Yes,' she said.

'You are satisfied then?'

Colthurst too found the heat breathless.

Ah! self-confident and altogether too deliberate clerical lover, for pity's sake make haste! If rescue is to be at all it must be speedy, for though the garrison holding the citadel of your mistress' heart shows a good front to the enemy, it is in sore straits.

Mary Crookenden stopped fanning herself. She carried her head haughtily.

'What right have you to ask me such a question? You have no right,' she said, and once more the fan took up its steady rhythmical movement.

Colthurst looked down again.

'B-by a d-death-bed, Miss Crookenden, one doesn't stop to carefully consider rights. One acts upon impulse, regardless of conventionalities. Here by the death-bed of the love I have borne you I dare to ask strange questions—and if you are kind you will answer them. From the first I knew that love was doomed. It was not in the nature of things it could live. N-now it is in its agony. Very soon I shall be forced to lay it in its coffin and go on my way as best I can without the tormenting joy and solace of it.

Don't misunderstand me,' he added. 'I am not making an appeal. I am merely stating facts. Facts of which I recognize the inevitable fitness as—well—as a fairly reasonable lost soul may be supposed to recognize the fitness of its own damnation. Only I think I should recognize that necessary fitness more completely—and, intellectually, anyhow, it would be a consolation to recognize it as fully as possible—if I had reason to believe you at least were happy. If I knew not only the woman-of-the-world in you is satisfied, but that the child is satisfied likewise; that it has found toys, a p-playfellow, a home—and that l-lullaby—and so is content.'

Colthurst spoke quite calmly. He stood near in the centre of the draped opening, his face and the upper part of his figure bathed in the dreamy amber-rose of the lamplight, showing in high relief against the gloom of cloud, and river, and night behind him. While across that gloom, now and again, the lightning leapt and flitted with, so it seemed to Mary Crookenden, a kind of evil quickness—at once a mockery and a menace, producing in her an indefinable terror. She hesitated, the apprehension of a great crisis upon her. Then in desperation of loyalty she lied; lied bravely, roundly, knowing that she lied, looking him in the face.

'Since you press the question home,' she said, 'yes, I am satisfied; I have found all I want.'

'Ah! that is well—d-damnation becomes almost palatable,' Colthurst said.

He leaned his elbows on the balustrade of the balcony, gazed down at the long row of carriages drawn

up along the kerb each with its double dot of light, at the waiting men-servants chatting in groups on the pavement, at the swirl of the flowing current and ebbing tide. Colthurst had hardly realised until now how much it would cost him to screw down the lid of this love's coffin. The chill pride that had come back to Miss Crookenden's bearing in the last few minutes only charmed him the more. His relation to her all along, save during that interview in the drawing theatre of the Connop School, had been fantastical, shadowy, unsubstantial. Yet in closing it—and that truly honouring her he was called upon now to close it, Colthurst never doubted—it seemed to him that he parted with the best thing he had had in life.

A huffle of wind, hot with the festering reek of the crowded streets away across the river, fluttered the leaves of the plane trees along the embankment, swept up and about him, the stale odours borne on it for the moment overpowering the sweetness of the flowers. Then the air fell dead still again, while the thunder rolled and rattled away down in the south. The wind affected him oddly. To him it bore something beside the stagnant reek of the streets. It bore a message from out of the stagnant profitless lives of Jenny Parris and little Dot. Colthurst was in the morbid humour in which it is possible to find absolute enjoyment in accentuating one's own suffering. A spirit of fantastic self-abnegation had possession of him. And so he asked himself—half from sheer hopelessness, half in obedience to the high ideal of conduct his love for Mary Crookenden had generated in him—why should he not right the wrong he had done

Jenny in a measure at all events? Why cling so determinedly to the fact of legal freedom, since, with Mary Crookenden's marriage, the one thing which had given legal freedom a certain subjective value was irrevocably lost? Why not marry Jenny Parris, and so take the stigma of shame off little Dot? He had no love to give Jenny Parris. She had strangled all love in him. She jarred him through and through, every fibre of him, like the sound of an instrument out of tune. She could never be more than his wife in name. But his name he could give her. He could go to the nearest Registry Office with her, make—in her own eyes—an honest woman of her; make his will too, settle the not contemptible sum coming in for these pictures of his on her and on his daughter, little Dot—and so pay a part, at least, of the debt he owed her. As the conception formed itself in Colthurst's mind, rapidly and with curious completeness of detail, the vision it called up was dreary, arid, dingy to the point of heart-break. He did not care. To him, just now, the very merit of the conception lay in the vulgar commonplace misery of it.

The wind huffled again. The thunder rattled out somewhat nearer. Colthurst raised himself, turned round, a smile on his lips. The contrast between what he saw in imagination and saw in fact was sufficiently violent. Mary Crookenden stood upright, looking away down the length of the balcony—which was singularly provoking to the senses in its cunningly blended colours, cunningly disposed lights, flowers, furnishings—her beauty emphasized by her rich dress, her flashing diamonds, by the stately pose

of her figure and the carriage of her head. Colthurst was filled with a madness of worship for her. Not only of worship for her physical beauty, but for her maidenhood, for the unstained fairness and purity of her. The Registry Office and Jenny Parris—yes. But first a word of kindness, a trifle of hope!

'Miss Crookenden,' he said, 'I have talked too much. You want to get away from me. I d-don't want to bother you; but before you go just this.—I had some conversation with Mr. Aldham when I first came in to-night. He tells me he cares for pictures. He was good enough to ask me down to your future home—later, in the autumn, you know, when you are settled there.'

The girl turned her head. And Colthurst remarked—as Hammond had remarked already—that she looked very fragile, ghostly almost. Her mouth was slightly open, and an expression of startled alarm made her eyes wide and wild. Twice she tried to interrupt, tried to stop him. But Colthurst refused to be stopped.

'No—let me go on. It's a very small matter. Let me go on,' he entreated. 'Don't suppose that I should be in your way, or that I should demand more from you than the most casual acquaintance among your guests. I should be just an odd man in a big house-party, had down to make up the number, to take any young lady in to dinner who didn't happen to be better provided for, while I paid for my keep in the smallest small-talk I could raise. I know myself p-pretty thoroughly. I know what is within and what is b-beyond my strength. This is within it, I

should be wholly unobjectionable.' Colthurst smiled at her.—'Wholly unobjectionable,' he repeated. 'So my coming would make no difference to you, and to me it would make just all the difference. It would be the grating through which one catches a glimpse of the blue sky in prison. It would—we were speaking of lost souls just now, you know—well, it would be Judas Iscariot's twelve hours' rest from hell in the cool and peace of the polar night.'

His speech was low, broken, eager, to his hearer cruelly moving.

Oh! Cyprian Aldham, Cyprian Aldham, who shall awake in you a sense of your danger? Rome is burning while you, frigidly punctilious young gentleman, are gracefully fiddling—fiddling to poor old Lady Theodosia Pringle, whom your host has bidden you take in to supper. Will you risk losing your wife to save your fine manners? In common modesty wait, at least, until she be indeed your wife before you thus make display of your self-respecting good breeding at her expense. The flesh has little enough power to tempt you, high-minded dainty-natured person that you are. But can we say as much for the world? Make haste, bestir yourself, hurry for once, putting your self-ocmplacency in your pocket; or I very much fear when at last you arrive, you will arrive altogether too late.

'Don't blot out the scrap of blue sky,' Colthurst stammered. 'Don't cut Judas off his twelve hours' respite from pain. You have all you want. You are satisfied, so to you it couldn't matter. To me it would bring infinite good. Let me come.'

But Mary Crookenden threw out her hands in passionate imploring rejection.

'Ah! no. God forbid. Anything but that,' she exclaimed.

Colthurst was keenly hurt.

'What have I done to you that you should hate me so?' he asked fiercely. 'I don't deserve it.'

'I do not hate you. It would be happier for me if I did.' Mary answered; and then her voice rose into a cry.

For the storm had broken at last. Broken in rough unseemly tumult. Nature declaring her eternal supremacy even here, amid miles of brick and mortar, despite of buildings, pavings, bridgings, tunnellings, despite too of human millineries and masqueradings. Broken, in blinding glare of lightning, and boisterous in-rushing wind that made the lamps sway and the tender greenhouse-grown lilacs writhe and shiver, and the draperies flap in wild confusion and tear at their fastenings. While the thunder pealed out overhead—a deafening, metallic crackle and roar, that went booming away, volley upon volley, up the course of the river into the far distance. Followed by a downpour of rain—the great drops beating in, insolently careless of Adolphus Carr's elegant upholsteries; beating in till they splashed chill on the girl's bare neck and shoulders.

Mary had been wrought up to a pitch of emotion in which ordinary incidents take on most portentous colours. The flash and clap, coming at that moment, begot in her a panic of fear as of impending judgment; while the cold whip of the rain laid on her

delicate flesh—so unaccustomed to the most distant hint of ill-usage—appeared an indignity, a cruelty, inducing in her a desolating sense of loneliness and friendlessness. So that it made the sobs rise in her throat, encircled by that brilliant weight of diamonds, even as wind and wet and callousness of nature to human distress make sobs rise in the throat of the ragged tramp huddled, shivering, under the hedge. All this was an affair of seconds. Then, though her eyes were closed—she had shut them to keep out the leaping glare of the lightning—she was aware of Colthurst close to her, standing between her and the inbeating rain, sheltering her, holding her hand quietly, with unaccentuated pressure, as he had held it once before. Aware that his presence, the personality and genius of the man, enfolded her, held her whole being spiritually as he held her hand actually in the steady clasp of his own.

One is told that in drowning, when the first instinctive passionate struggle for life is over, there comes a self-abandonment which is almost luxurious, a joy of yielding weakness the more exquisite because of the fearfulness of past conflict. Mary experienced something of this just now. The struggle of loyalty, the fight for independence were pretty well over. Our proud, milk-white maiden began to drown peacefully, willingly, not indeed without a certain exultation. The sobs sank away. She opened her eyes, and looked with a sort of wonder at the lilac blossoms scattered on the ground, at the long length of the balcony, a queer effect of wreck and disorder upon it. The wind was falling again, the lightning

was less vivid, and there were lengthening pauses between the thunder-claps. Servants came hurrying out to tidy away the traces of disaster and close the tall windows of the rooms.

Colthurst quietly unclasped her hand.

'You m-must go inside of all this,' he said. 'The worst is over—and for me the b-best is over too.'

The note of hopelessness in these last few words aroused Mary Crookenden. She ceased to drown peacefully. The moral struggle was renewed. But it was renewed on other lines. She could not look her position fairly in the face as yet. She was too close to it. It was not possible to see it in the perspective which alone could make it intelligible. But upon one point she was resolved her mind should be set at rest. So she took her courage in both hands, turned and asked Colthurst the question plainly—baldly, if you will—which she had asked herself a hundred times since the sunny afternoon in Slerracombe Deer Park, when she had recognized them both—the man and woman of the 'Road to Ruin.'

'Tell me,' she said, almost sternly—'what is the meaning of the despairing tone in which you speak about yourself, about your life, about love? Why is it Are you married already?'

Colthurst moved a step back, with a queer upward jerk of his head as though he had been struck. He hesitated, while Mary stood watching him, her eyes fixed on him; while the rain streamed down on the canvas roof; while the servants moved to and fro, and the frightened carriage horses backed and plunged in the street below. The cool calculating side of

Colthurst came to the fore. With unsparing directness it put the case before him. To say yes, and so save this woman whom he so dearly and devoutly worshipped from all possibility of defilement, all possibility of entanglement with these two sad, profitless lives, bound up irrevocably with his own? To say yes, merely forestalling fact by a few hours, and give Jenny Parris legal right to his name and to whatever of money and position might go along with it before this day, just beginning, had run out? Or to say no—to repudiate Jenny's moral claim on him once and for all? To declare himself free and take his chance?—And what a chance! What intoxicating delight that chance offered if he read Mary Crookenden's question aright. The rage of living was still strong in Colthurst for all his morbidness, for all his fanatic fancies. The thought of that chance made him set his teeth, while the blood throbbed through his veins like liquid fire.—But then again the risk of eventual misery to her. What had he said himself? The finest work is grounded in refusal; built upon 'thou shalt not' rather than 'thou shalt.' Was it so with the finest love? And then Colthurst saw that the most excellent way, the most splendid proof of his true love for Mary Crookenden lay in refusal—the most excellent way for him—good God! the tragedy, the bathos of it—led slap into the open door of the Registry Office side by side with the bastard and the harlot.

With a desperate courage he met the girl's serious, questioning gaze. Tried to tell her. Tried, in terms as little offensive as possible, to explain. But the

words would not get themselves spoken. In his extremity his stammer once again became absolutely unmanageable.

At that moment two gentlemen came towards them. The foremost was Cyprian Aldham—Cyprian Aldham at last. Then the tormenting, debasing, insoluble riddle of sex obtruded itself, would take no denial, made its voice heard. And Colthurst fell. For the sight of Mary Crookenden's affianced husband coming thus to claim her, provoked in him the blind fury of jealousy towards a rival common, alas! to man and beast alike. His whole moral attitude changed. The real rose up and murdered the ideal, as in vigorous natures possessed of vigorous passions, at times, it inevitably will and must. Not as some high-exalted, spiritually-apprehended incarnation of inaccessible maidenhood did Colthurst now behold Mary Crookenden, but as sweet flesh and blood woman, to be wooed and won, to be rejoiced over as bride and wife, to lie in his bosom, and be at once—so strangely contradictory is man's desire—his goddess and his property, his inspiration and in a sense his slave. By a tremendous effort he mastered his stammering tongue.

'Married? N-no no. Ten thousand times no,' he said.

Chapter III.

The week following Mr. Carr's royal entertainment was not of precisely millennial peace and security to the students of the Connop School. They went delicately, like unhappy Agag, having a general sense of

hewing in pieces disagreeably imminent. Colthurst's moods, as we are aware, had a habit of making themselves felt; and his present mood was a peculiarly withdrawn and pre-occupied one, out of which he seemed to rush at intervals, as out of some cavern, armed with truly startling powers of invective and mordant criticism. He was, it must be conceded, ill to live with during that week. But to no one worse to live with than to himself. For the end of his interview with Miss Crookenden had left him suspended, like Mohammed's coffin, between earth and heaven; and which of the two was designed to be his eventual resting-place he had as yet no means to determine. Aldham and Hammond had come, and Miss Crookenden had gone away with them. The whole business, so far as he was concerned, had been cut off clean, as with a knife.

How much her question had meant, for how much his answer might be taken to stand, the full significance of her declaration that it would perhaps be happier for her if she did hate him—on these cardinal points Colthurst was painfully in suspense. And he saw no practicable way of relieving his suspense. There were reasons in plenty, to his thinking, which rendered it obviously impossible for him to go and ask Miss Crookenden for explanations. And here Colthurst's underlying fatalism became of signal service to him once more. It enabled him to retain his mental equilibrium in respect of the issues raised by those cardinal points, it enabled him to 'stay put' in respect of the future. For, after all, what is to be, must be; you can no more hurry Destiny than you

can delay her. One is always in plenty of time, dawdle as one may, for the Inevitable; that is a train one is perfectly safe to catch. So Colthurst just sat down under his present suspense in grim patience, determined to await the event—not to act, as far as might be not even to think. But this Spartan-like resolution was by no means calculated to soothe an irritable temper; and so his near neighbourhood was certainly to be avoided rather than courted, during that week, by any anxious to keep whole the skin of their self-conceit.

Work is about the best anodyne for the dull ache of suspense, and Colthurst worked like a horse. Not content with the pictures he had in hand and the daily routine of the school, he took to attending the evening classes for male students usually carried on under the mild auspices of Mr. Barwell. And he dropped in to one of the said classes for an hour one night on his way to a 'small and early' dance at the Frank Lorimers'. Colthurst was not very much in the humour, as can easily be credited, to go and make sport for the social philistines; moreover his enthusiasm for his prospective host and hostess was always of the slightest. Mrs. Frank's pretty little person and shrewd, self-sphered, impenetrable little nature vexed him. He knew she regarded him very much as a bull in a china-shop; and, by natural fatality, in her presence, something of a bull in a china-shop he only too frequently became. Still, the Lorimers were friends of Miss Crookenden; and Colthurst's Spartanism did not carry him so far as to prevent his being willing enough to embrace any

opportunity of hearing news of that young lady which might present itself. So he went into the school duly arrayed for the festivity ahead; though all the same the prospect of the said festivity was so little alluring that his tongue and temper were highly distinguished for the reverse of suavity during that evening class. The students heard him close the door of the theatre with relief. Even Mr. Barwell had been somewhat mauled; and now the good man followed him, along the flagged passage and up the stone stairs, very much in the spirit in which a faithful dog, that has endured an unjust beating, trots sadly reflective at his master's heels.

'It's p-positively disgusting,' Colthurst was saying, as he reached the top of the flight; 'they haven't an ounce of imagination b-between them, I believe. B-but I could forgive that. P-people aren't responsible for being born fools. What I can't forgive is their want of application.'

As he crossed the hall the porter put a note into his hand.

'It was sent on from your rooms, sir,' he said. 'They said the person who brought it begged you might have it at once.'

Colthurst took the note mechanically, and went on to the office.

'In that, I must say, the female students, notwithstanding their affectations, are a lot the pleasantest to deal with of the two. Even the stupid ones have the merit of being more or less in earnest.'

He moved across to the gas-jet over the office table and held the note up to the light. The address was in

pencil. It was in Jenny Parris's not very scolarly handwriting. It was something new for Jenny to send him notes. The hard line cut itself deep across Colthurst's forehead. What the devil did she want?

'I suppose we may hope to see one of our most earnest young ladies back again before very long, at this rate,' Mr. Barwell observed mildly.

He clasped his lean hands under his coat-tails, and rested his back against the wall. The under-master was rather done up, rather hurt; yet still, in his amiable way, he made an effort to give the talk a less growling tone.

'She threw us over for matrimony; but now, if report speaks truly, she has thrown over matrimony in its turn. So we may hope she will return to her first love.'

Colthurst stripped the envelope off the note, and turned up the gas, which hissed and spluttered for a moment. Jenny's writing was almost illegible.

Meantime Mr. Barwell continued his small remarks.

'I shall be glad if she does return, for she was distinctly one of our best workers, and a young lady of her standing helps to keep up the tone among our students. And then too'—he added, 'I'm an old fellow, so there's no harm I think in my saying it—it cheers one and does one good to see so charming a sight as she is sometimes.'

The under-master shifted his long back into an easier position against the wall, smiled and then sighed involuntarily. Even his gentle unexacting nature rebelled somewhat against the on-coming of Old Age, its deprivations, humiliations, disabilities. For him

life had had no splendid, no tremendous hours. It had just been a steady piece of collar work along an extremely ordinary road. His share in the romance of the worship of art had been confined to sweeping down the steps of the temple, and teaching novices their a, b, c. The making of music within, the celebrating of the mass, had been for others. And now Old Age laid its hand on him, and whispered that even sweeping the temple steps, even teaching lazy scholars the rudiments, would soon be better done by younger men. Colthurst had confirmed that whisper to-night, in the drawing theatre; had hinted, in a moment of irritation, he was getting past his work. The good man was sore.

'Yes, selfishly, I hope she'll come back here,' he said; 'for I should derive my own private modicum of pleasure from the return of Miss Crookenden.'

To the first part of this little discourse Colthurst had not been attending; but at the last few words he was round with a sort of flash, while the ill-written, crumpled sheet of note-paper fluttered down to the floor.

'M-Miss Crookenden coming back here? What d-do you know about her coming back?' he stammered.

'Oh! I have no authority for asserting that she will return here,' Mr. Barwell answered, a good deal flurried by this unexpected display of fireworks right in the middle of his sentimental reflections. 'Only, as I learn she has broken off her engagement, it struck me as not improbable——'

Colthurst could not restrain himself. 'W-where did you learn that?' he demanded.

'From yesterday's paper—the *Morning Post*,' Mr. Barwell said, not without a touch of dignity. He resented—really he could not help resenting—this very abrupt and hectoring form of address. 'My sisters happened to see the paper at a friend's house, and having heard me speak of Miss Crookenden they informed me of the announcement.'

'I beg your pardon for cross-questioning you'—Colthurst made a strong effort to subdue his excitement—'b-but I had not heard the news. I know Mr. Aldham, and so it has a special interest for me. What exactly was the announcement?'

'That the marriage arranged between—I forget the gentleman's name—Oldham—Aldham, yes, Aldham you said—and Miss Crookenden would not take place. That was the wording as reported to me.'

Mr. Barwell left the kindly support of the office wall, went towards the door with his shuffling walk. Colthurst's small apology had mollified him, gone far to restore his momentarily wavering allegiance; but the hand of Old Age pressed upon him, there was no question about that. He grew so fatigued of night now—quite longed for the repose of the semi-detached villa and affectionate ministrations of the gentle parrot-nosed sisters at Hampstead.

'Well, good-night, Mr. Colthurst,' he said. 'I hope you will enjoy an agreeable evening. I must go down to those idle young gentlemen of ours. I suppose we shall welcome you at the accustomed hour in the morning.'

'Of c-course—yes—good-night,' Colthurst answered absently.

He sat down at the office table, rested his elbows on it, leaned his head in his hands. For a good twenty minutes he remained peacefully in that attitude. Through the prosaic medium of a daily paper Mary Crookenden had informed all whom it might concern that her proposed marriage was broken off. She had probably done this to put a stop both to congratulatory letters and speeches, and to the arrival of wedding presents. The reason mattered little enough to Colthurst, it was the fact he hailed, just the bare, simple fact. It quieted him as opium quiets. For the time it filled him with a rapturous calm, in which all his faculties rested in a state of enchanted inactivity. The fact was enough in and by itself as yet.

But the western mind cannot long remain in this condition of trance-like beatitude, thanks to the vexatious impatience of the western body. Downstairs the model was leaving; and a confused noise of talk and movement in the theatre marked the breaking up of the evening class. Colthurst rose to his feet, stretched himself, took a long breath. Outside the soft brooding twilight lingered even yet. He thought he would wait until the students had departed,—Mrs. Frank Lorimer's 'small and early' was out of the question now, an insult to taste and intelligence—and then he would go out and walk. Walk, it didn't much matter where. Walk, till the brief obscurity of the summer night melted into the fair summer dawn, and to-morrow awoke and climbed up the rosy eastern sky. 'Beloved to-morrow' as it

seemed to Colthurst just then—though precisely what he counted on to-morrow bringing him, he was, at present, too content to care to ask.

Crossing the office to fetch his hat and overcoat, his foot slipped slightly on a piece of paper. Colthurst stooped and picked it up; and with a quick, sickening revulsion of feeling saw and remembered Jenny Parris' note. He hesitated a minute, then went back under a gas-jet to read it.

'I would not ask you for myself,' it ran, 'after what's past, but Dot's ill and goes on mourning for you all the while; she's your own child, you know, Jim, and the doctor says it's a question if she lasts over the night like she is now.'

What! are you turned jade and hussy all of a sudden, 'beloved to-morrow,' lifting your veil thus befor the time and showing a glimpse of something singularly unlovely lying in your lap? Colthurst put on his hat and overcoat, set out on his walk. Not to some opium-eater's fine-fanciful love paradise, but down St. Martin's Lane, through Westminster, on by dreary shabby-genteel street after street south-westward to Delamere Crescent.

Chapter IV.

Jenny Parris was at her best in illness, unselfish, patient, self-forgetful.

'Drink it down like a good little maid,' she was saying as Colthurst came in, and her voice was sweet with a sober, motherly tenderness.

But the lodging-house sitting-room looked even less attractive than usual,—the table in the middle of it cluttered up with medicine bottles, a finger bowl of rapidly melting ice, a half-emptied tin of jelly, a basin of toilet vinegar and water, the cleanly scent of which struggled but unsuccessfully against the tainted air of the room. Jenny's gown had been flung down, anyhow, upon the arm-chair by the fire-place; while she, arrayed in a black alpaca petticoat and pink flannel jacket (very much past its first youth) sat, a fine unself-consciousness and absorption in her whole attitude, leaning over the horse-hair sofa on which Dot lay. The neck of the little girl's night-gown gaped open, showing her flat childish bosom; her back was propped up with bed-pillows; and a Mexican blanket, once white with a magneta and black border and centre piece to it, now of somewhat indiscriminate hue, was wrapped about her feet and legs. Steve Kingdon had brought that blanket home to his sweetheart long ago, from Manzanillo on the Pacific Coast. And Colthurst loathed it with a consummate loathing; for it had been the most substantial, at last the only, covering of his own sick bed during that waking night-mare of a time in the garret of the *Hotel Garni* in Paris, now just four years back.

'Drink it down like a good little maid,' Jenny repeated.

And Mrs. Prust, standing at the foot of the couch, all kindly, blinking, fussy solicitude, echoed the refrain.

'Yes, take it all down, there's a pretty dear. Cap-

tain Prust 'ull be as pleased as never was to hear Dot's took her physic like a sensible, good child.'

But poor Dot was not more amenable in sickness than in health. She tossed her head to and fro with the restlessness of semi-delirium. Her eyes were closed, her usually pale cheeks all of a flame, and her lips almost black.

'I don't want no nasty old medicine,' she fretted, 'I want to go away. I want to go where it's pretty. Everything's so poky here. I want Mr. Snell to come and take me to see the ladies dance. Where's Jim? Why don't you fetch him, Mammy? I tell you I wants Jim.'

Mrs. Prust pursed up her mouth and shook her head, until the chenille blossoms decorating her cap vibrated wildly. Colthurst had entered the room very quietly, her attention was claimed by the child and her back was towards the door. So was Jenny's for that matter. But she had no need to be told when Colthurst came into the house. She knew his step as he passed along the pavement, knew his ring at the bell; felt his coming bodily, right through her, with a bitter, yet delicious spasm and stab.

'Well, you can have what you want, then, that way,' she said, quietly; 'Jim's here.'

'What, Mr. Colthurst—never,' the landlady cried, wheeling round. But she restrained further comments, congratulatory or the reverse, for in truth Colthurst's present costume impressed her considerably. And, as she subsequently informed her master-mariner downstairs, though she 'didn't hold with Mr. Colthurst's goings on, and never had, she

was bound to say, and if it was her last word on earth she'd say it, that he looked every inch a gentleman to-night and no mistake.'

Meanwhile Colthurst examined the sick child.

'What's the matter with her?' he asked.

'Typhoid fever,' Jenny said, over her shoulder without moving. 'She's been awful bad this last week. Clean out of her head by times, telling all manner of foolishness.'

Here Mrs. Prust found a dab absolutely irresistible.

'And her poor mother all alone with her, night and day, till she's properly wore out.'

Colthurst glanced at the speaker not quite pleasantly.

'I think we can dispense with your p-presence now, thank you, Mrs. Prust,' he said. 'I p-propose remaining here to-night and helping to nurse Dot.'

Then he put aside his hat and overcoat, drew one of the shiny horse-hair chairs up beside the sofa, silently took the wineglass of medicine from Jenny. He slipped his left hand, out-stretched, under the nape of the child's neck and thin shoulders raising her slightly; while, at his touch, she made a queer little croodling sound of comfort. Jenny Parris had known the calming, sustaining quality of that touch before now. She never expected to know it again. She had not seen Colthurst since the evening following her luckless visit to the Connop School, and she feared that that day's work had made a breach between them past closing. And so hearing the child's croodling cry, understanding just what it meant, poor Jenny began to feel a hungry jealousy all crossbarring

her mother love. She watched, as a jealous person invariably watches eagerly that which most greatly inflames them, a dry light in her grey eyes.

And through Colthurst too, that odd, half animal intimation of solace sent a rather painful thrill. Taken in connection with the sight of the old Mexican blanket, with the sight of Jenny's handsome haggard face and untidy attire, taken in connection with the news of Mary Crookenden's broken engagement, it struck home, shook his nerve. A minute or more elapsed before he quite cared to trust himself to speak.

'L-look here, Dot,' he said at length, 'I have come and I'll stay and help you to get well. B-but you must do as I tell you. You must drink this.'

'I don't want any more nasty old medicine,' and the child began to toss her head from side to side again. 'I wants you to kiss me, Jim.'

A flush came over Colthurst's dark skin.

'Very well, I'll kiss you, b-but only when you have d-drunk your medicine,' he said.

She fretted feebly; and, in Jenny Parris, witnessing her helpless suffering, jealousy died down and mother love once again rose paramount.

'Poor little mortal, humour her, Jim. For God's sake don't teaze her any more. I can't stand it.'

'If I am to manage her at all, I must manage her in my own way,' Colthurst answered. He held the glass to the child's mouth again. 'D-drink it, Dot, and then I'll kiss you.'

'Oh! you'm cruel hard,' Jenny cried.

She got up hastily, went to the table, turning her

back on him; heard the little girl's sobbing protest, the man's unmoved insistence, then a gulping struggle to swallow on the part of Dot. Jenny pressed her clenched hands against her chest. It was just all she could do not to drag the glass away, not to make a scene with him. Yet when the gulping was over, and she, looking round, saw Colthurst kissing the child, her thin arms clinging about his neck, jealousy once more invaded Jenny Parris. She would have given her soul for a kiss just then had such unholy bargain been feasible.

'Oh!' nurse me, Jim!' Dot moaned out, as he raised his head. 'I likes to be against you. Your clothes smell so lovely.—Mammy's clothes always smells of nothing but the cupboard. And this nasty old sofa's so knobby. I can't never go to sleep. And I'm so tired—so dreadful tired.'

When the wailing voice ceased Jenny stood for a moment motionless. Then she threw back her head with something of her old, generous, impulsive daring, and came across to the sofa again.

'Take and nurse her, Jim,' she said, 'there's a good fellow. Sleep's the thing to cure her if she's to be cured. And you can put her to sleep if you've a mind to, like you can do anything else when you've the mind.'

She snatched up the Mexican blanket and arranged it over his right arm and his knees.—'That's to save your lovely clothes,' she said, not without a dash of mockery. She stooped down, lifted the little girl, tenderly, skilfully, and placed her in Colhurst's arms.

Stooped lower and wrapped the loose end of the blanket about her feet.

'Put he to sleep, Jim,' she said, huskily. 'Cure her. She's a wicked little thing; but she's yours as well as mine, and she's all of you I've got left—now.'

And Jenny went and flung herself down in the arm-chair by the fire-place. She kept her eyes fixed on Colthurst's profile, on his bent head, on the sweep of his broad shoulders, as he leaned a little forward cradling the child; followed his every movement with insatiable attention, motionless, save now and then when a fit of coughing shook her, for Jenny's cough had been troublesome of late, and her handkerchiefs, too often, had come to be stained with blood.

Colthurst, meanwhile, steeled himself against her scrutiny, doing his best to concentrate all his thought upon the little girl, whose body, dry and burning from fever, felt like a hot plate lying across his knees. In his deft way he stripped up her night-gown sleeve, and began passing his finger tips softly round the palm of her hand, up as far as the hollow of her arm and down again to her wrist. But at first the mesmeric charm refused to work. To make it work, the operator needs a disengaged mind; and Colthurst's mind was rather horribly preoccupied. For, after his absence of some weeks, the mean, littered room, all that it stood for, all that it implied, its tainted atmosphere, struck him with a freshness of repulsion, of remorse, of rage against himself, that he had gone and made this thing, this ugly cage as of unclean birds, wherein, from time to time, it was ordained his

soul must come and sit. Even his natural pity for the sick child was doubled with a kind of spiritual disgust; for he saw in her the poisonous fruit of his own sin—an evil deed taking on bodily form and confronting the doer of it as a material fact; saw in her the incarnation of his own lust and Jenny's ruin.

And so, not unnaturally, at first he failed to soothe Dot. Every few minutes she opened her eyes and broke into rambling, disjointed talk.

'I wish you'd come and live along of us, Jim,' she said, presently. 'It's all so dull now you don't never come.—What a lovely clean shirt you've got.'

And Dot wriggled her restless head about till her hot cheek rested against the cool, smooth surface of Colthurst's shirt front.

'I love's you better 'n any one,' she went on. 'Much better 'n Mammy. Mammy's always so mopey.'

The leather cover of the arm-chair creaked as Jenny shifted her position.

'B-be quiet, Dot,' Colthurst stammered.

'Oh, let her talk. You needn't be considerate of me. It's a bit late for that. And I'm pretty well used to that sort of talk—hear it most days,' Jenny said, recklessly; and then the dragging cough took her.

To Colthurst all this was inexpressibly painful. He could not sit still under it. He got up and began walking backwards and forwards the length of the two rooms, for the double doors were open into the bed-chamber, carrying the child in his arms. He

hoped movement might serve to still Dot; but on went the relentless little voice.

'I wish you'd come and live along of us,' she repeated. 'I wish you was my father.'

'Hush, hush,' said Colthurst.

'But I do. I loves you better'n anybody. And the children in the street throws it up against me I ain't got no father.'

'Do they? The little devils!' Colthurst murmured under his breath. He felt rather beside himself.

Just then his walk brought him opposite to Jenny. She lay back in the arm-chair, exhausted by her fit of coughing. Her breathing was irregular and laboured. She pushed the dark masses of her hair up from her forehead and wiped her face round with a very shaky hand. The light from the gas over the table fell on her. She looked ghastly; Colthurst seeing her softened somewhat.

'I'm afraid you're ill again,' he said.

'That's an old tale,' she answered, her lips parting in a half-defiant smile.

'B-but have you seen a doctor? Has he p-prescribed for you? Have you taken what he ordered?' Colthurst asked.

'Doctor's stuff's not much use for my complaint.' —Jenny's eyes met him, her smile sweetened, quivered, died.—'The white witch over to Nettlecombe used to give the maids a draught to keep true love,' she said, slowly; 'and I'm thinking that's the stuff as 'ud do me most good, Jim.'—She wiped her face round again, and her voice grew as shaky as her hand. 'But up here in London they don't know how to set

about making medicine like that. They're a deal too wide-awake to believe in such a pack of old foolishness, and so—'

Her speech was interrupted by another fit of coughing. Colthurst walked on into the dusk of the unlighted bed-room, and sat down on the edge of the disordered, unmade bed.

'Oh my God! what must I do, what must I do?' he said.

Again he thought, and seriously, of the Registry Office; but that, so it seemed to him, did not meet the requirements of the case. It would cripple him, mutilate, and stultify the possibilities of his life, and yet fail to satisfy Jenny. For Jenny wanted not his name but his love. And that she should have his love was impossible, out of all nature and reason, they standing to each other in the relation in which they now stood. Colthurst, in his present extremity, could have resigned the hope of ever drawing nearer to Mary Crookenden; but to resign it to no purpose—that seemed too much. Then Dot asserted the fact of her sad little existence once more.

'I want to go away where it's pretty,' she repeated, fretfully. 'It's all so ugly here, and the children's bad to me.—There's children as wears lovely short frocks and sashes tied low down, and I'd like to play with—but they drives me away,'—Dot's fretting rose into crying—''cause they says their mothers says Mammy's a kept-woman, and so they mustn't 'sociate along of me; and their frocks is lovely—and they've got a doll's pr'am—and I wants to play with 'em awful bad. Why's Mammy like—'

At first Colthurst had not been conscious of the drift of her talk, but he had gathered enough of it, and more than enough now. He laid his hand on the child's mouth, and, with a dislocating sensation of mingling pathos, shame, abhorrence, felt her parched lips kiss and re-kiss the palm of it. Verily this was a vile thing which he had made, a horrible place wherein his soul must come and sit! For a moment his courage gave out. The skein seemed too tangled for any disentangling. The old longing took him for rest and peace and escape at any price. Then by one of those immense acts of will, in which the energy that should rightly go to cover some weeks of living is expended in a few seconds, he pulled himself together, got up, went back into the sitting-room again, placed himself on the sofa, raised his hand from the child's burning, kissing mouth, bent down over her, looked her in the eyes.

'You shall go away, where it is p-pretty, go away for a long while,' he said. 'But to be able to go you must get well, and to get well you must sleep. Do you hear? you are to sleep, Dot—to sleep—listen, to sleep.'

And once more he began stroking her wrist, his fingers moving slowly up to the hollow of her arm and down again; with the result that as the heavy minutes passed she grew quieter, her eyelids drooped, closed, while her breathing became more regular.

But Jenny, unluckily, had misinterpreted Colthurst's whole course of action, thought him callous, thought he had gone away into the bedroom to avoid her, thought he had returned now to show his indif-

ference to her suffering. And so, seeing him bend down and speak in that low whispering way of his to Dot, jealousy, rivalry of her own child again tore her. Yet, so strangely does mother-love overrule even the headiest passion, she waited until she believed Dot to be safely asleep, and then hardly spoke above her breath.

'You didn't make yourself so smart just out of compliment to us, Jim, I reckon,' she said. 'You go out most nights now to some grand doings or other, I expect. Fay! I wouldn't mind having a chance to go to some of 'em too. I'm like Dot, I want to go away where it's pretty.'—Jenny rubbed back her rough hair, and her voice took that taunting ring again.—'Suppose you tell about it all, Jim, while we sit here so nice and quiet. It 'ud help to pass the time a bit. Where were you off to to-night?'

'To Mrs. Frank Lorimers' dance,' he answered, succinctly.

'Im sorry we spoilt your pleasure by sending for you down to our poor place,' Jenny returned. 'Seems quite a pity, doesn't it? And who were you going to dance with?'

Colthurst had been studying the magenta and black border of the Mexican blanket while Jenny was speaking. Her tone, the rasping incongruity of his whole position, maddened him. He turned wicked.

'With no one,' he said. 'I d-don't dance in these days, not even to a b-barrel organ on the doorstep, like my sweetly-brought-up little d-daughter here.'

'Ah, that's a bad one,' Jenny cried out, sharply. And Colthurst was forced to own to himself it was

an extremely bad one. But that was precisely why he dreaded and recoiled from this unhappy woman so. She had a fatal capacity of bringing out the very worst in him, of driving him to do and say all that was most repugnant to the finer taste and nobler nature in him. And it was just this capacity of Jenny's which in his opinion constituted her unpardonable offence. She had a demoralising effect upon him. It is comparatively easy, under certain conditions, to forgive our neighbour his own trespasses; but it is well nigh impossible to forgive him the trespasses he makes us ourselves commit.

But here Dot created a diversion, and this time a fortunate one. During the above conversation, low-toned though it was, she had become increasingly restless. Now her limbs twitched and started, and her eyelids opened partially, showing the whites of her eyes.

'Oh! I'm so thirsty, Mammy,' she moaned. 'I'm all like I was on fire inside of me. And the penny-ice man with the red and blue waggon's up along the street. Give me a penny, Mammy.—Oh! he's going, he's going, why ever ain't you quick?'

At the first moaning cry Jenny was on her feet. She came across, knelt down in front of Colthurst, put a spoonful of jelly to the child's mouth.

'Poor little soul,' she said, softly, while with characteristic absence of ceremony she planted the jelly tin on Colthurst's knee. 'Catch hold of it, Jim. Perhaps she'll take in a bit more if I try her; and it's the first mortal thing that's crossed her lips but a

drop of water and the medicine you gave her these twelve hours.'

So there he sat, our man of genius, our devout lover of a pure maiden—and surely there was a good deal of heroism, a good deal of nobility, in the position? holding the tin of jelly, holding Dot; Jenny kneeling before him, while the fronts of her old pink flannel jacket swept against him at every movement, her rough hair almost brushed his face, while patiently, tenderly, forgetting self, forgetting—harder thing by far to a woman—the close proximity of the man whom she adored—in obedience to the divinely excellent instinct of motherhood, she fed the sick child.

In spite of himself, Colthurst was touched.—'Look here, Jenny,' he said, quietly, 'I have no wish to quarrel with you and behave b-brutally to you. Your case is pretty hard, b-but, before God, mine isn't much better. The principal difference is that your wretchedness has no lie in it, is all of a piece. Whereas mine has a showy outside to it—is a sepulchre, of which the world as a rule only sees the staring white-wash; while I see, with an endless nausea, the dead men's bones and all the uncleanness lying rotting within.'

'I don't want no more, Mammy,' and Dot turned away her head fretfully.

Jenny stood up, took the tin from Colthurst, waited a moment looking down at him out of tragic grey eyes.

'Let's cry quits, for to-night at least, for the child's sake,' he went on, 'We brought her into the world

to please ourselves, and were a pair of consummate fools for our pains; but that's neither here nor there. Now don't let us risk adding murder to the old sin, by letting her slip out of it again while we are busy gratifying our very natural inclination for slanging each other. I can't argue with you and soothe her to sleep both at once. B-be reasonable. Leave me alone. D-don't badger me. You must see that lengthening the long score we have run up against each other won't really do either of us the faintest good.'—His tone became less bitter.—'Go and lie down—get some rest. It is clear enough you need it; and leave me in peace to do my best for the child.'

It was past five, broad day, when at last Colthurst let himself out into the street; the long, confused, distressful night was over, with all its warring emotions, its cruel strain and fret. The little girl lay sleeping on the bed in the back room. And Jenny slept too, in the arm-chair by the fire-place: her left arm raised, her hand under the back of her head, her full lips pouting, her forehead drawn into a frown beneath the unruly masses of her dark hair, while her bosom rose and fell in quick catching breaths. Large-limbed, statuesque even now, though wasted by disgrace, sorrow, and that dragging cough, she looked like some worn passion-torn Maenad, with—for the fashions of the ages change queerly—rusty black alpaca petticoat in place of fawn skin, and clasped in her right hand for the thyrsus, the plated tea-spoon with which she had fed little Dot.

Chapter V.

Dot did not die. Such superfluous members of society rarely die somehow, but she had more than one bad relapse. Her illness was stubborn, it cost Colthurst time, thought, and money; for he continued to do his duty by the child in a spirit of dogged patience. More than one night he sat up with her, and went away in the early summer mornings dazed and spent, to take up his day's work at the Connop School. He led a curiously dual life during this illness of Dot's, and he found it very distracting. Sometimes when Jenny, over-wrought by anxiety and watching, losing sight of his present kindness in the memory of past wrongs done her, let loose her tongue upon him, Colthurst, to borrow his own rather violent phrase, had reason to congratulate himself on being in pandemonium well up to the neck. He had heard that Miss Crookenden had gone out of town. He knew no more than that; and it seemed to him, under existing circumstances, there would be a certain grossness in trying to find out more. All that must stand over for the present, probably stand over for ever. Residence in pandemonium does not tend to generate a hopeful frame of mind.

Meanwhile, invitations continued to pour in upon Colthurst, for he remained very much the fashion during that season. His flavour was a pungent one, and therefore welcome to Society's rather jaded palate. He was famous and consequently was *fêted*. Pretty women petted him—or, to be accurate, did their best to pet him, for Colthurst was not an

animal altogether easy to pet—and when he treated them to some rather blasting sentiment, pronounced him to be 'really most deliciously quaint.' All this caused him much bitter amusement, and his existence seemed to him most thoroughly of the sepulchre sort.

And so time drew on until the summer term ended, and the Connop School closed for the vacation; but Colthurst remained in London, waiting until Dot should be sufficiently convalescent to be sent off to the seaside with her mother. It was not until the first week in August that the child was strong enough to be moved. Colthurst went to Delamere Crescent on the morning of her departure; saw her and Mrs. Prust and Jenny and a very miscellaneous assortment of luggage—a sea-chest, rickety band boxes, bulging brown paper parcels—bestowed within and upon a four-wheel cab *en route* for Waterloo.

He watched the cab drive off—Dot putting her pale little face out of window and kissing her hand effusively to him—with a dreary sense of accomplishment, of dull relief. This business was over for the present, any how, and he was thankful. But he had a feeling of utter depression upon him. It was over, but only to begin again later in some other form. He was not rid of it, only rid of a phase of it. And as Colthurst wandered away by the mean, shabby-genteel streets down to the Embankment, in a purposeless fashion very uncommon to him, he asked himself savagely whether the next phase might not be worse even than the last.

The day was not calculated to dispel depression. It was overcast, colourless, while everything seemed

coated by all-pervading dust. Even the river looked dusty, running low and sluggish, fouled here and there by great floats of iridescent scum. In few places can you be more completely alone than in London in August. To Colthurst the solitude was not unwelcome. He had had only too constant companionship of a kind lately. The unwholesome moral and, indeed, physical atmosphere he had breathed, the conflicting emotions induced in him by Dot, the strain of constant intercourse with Jenny—of behaving decently to her yet keeping her at arm's length—had told on him, for the moment had drained his vitality. He felt utterly empty, as though he had no volition, no power of recovery or rebound left. He sat down on a bench facing the river, took off his hat, and stared aimlessly at the slow drifting scum.

'I am regularly played out,' he said. 'Jenny and circumstances combined will be too much for me, after all. And the thing which rules this great lie of a world, God, devil, blind force or Fate—whichever it is—is unjust, unjust. It picks out a victim here and there at random, to make an example of, while it lets a score of others, whose crimes are just as black, get off scot free. And it has paid me the very left-handed compliment of picking me out, placing me among the examples. I have done no worse than numbers who marry and settle, as the phrase runs, and flourish like green bay trees and produce whole groves of legitimate small bay trees; while scandal never raises a finger against them in the way of revelation of a doubtful past.'

Colthurst turned his head, looked along the bench.

At the further end of it a man lay sleeping, his face pillowed on his folded arms.

'Yes, the thing is unjust,' he repeated, 'unjust. You and your next-door neighbour are guilty of precisely the same lapse. To him, in the long run, it makes not a fraction of difference, while you are hounded to death.'

He gazed sullenly at the man lying along the bench, a disreputable figure dressed in what had once been good clothes—that sorriest of garments a seedy frock coat—the leg of one trouser, moreover, hitched up, showing that he wore no socks, had nothing on his feet save a pair of cracked and dusty old patent-leather boots. Colthurst, observing him, was affected by a despairing sense of brotherhood.

'There is another victim,' he said. 'Another poor wretch made an example of—hung up like a crow by one wing in a cornfield to warn other crows of filling their crops with forbidden pleasures.'

He looked back at the floating scum.

'By heaven, I should be glad to know how low it is the intention of the Thing which made me that I am to fall? Am I ordained to sink and sink, till I too come to lie on a bench in broad day on my stomach, in the few clothes I have saved from the pawn shop, and drown the shame of a great failure in sottish sleep?'

Colthurst got up.

'There's always one remedy in reserve,' he said. 'Nothing can deprive one of that, but want of pluck; and so far whatever I have lacked I haven't lacked pluck, I think.'

He went on, the same drained dead-alive feeling upon him. It was an ill-starred morning, whatever was grotesque and unsightly appeared to have come forth to display itself. All the cripples seemed to be out and about, all the slatternly women and girls, the tails of whose tattered skirts lick up the refuse of the pavement; all the underfed, scrofulous children; all the broken-winded, spavined horses. And everything, on everything, thick and choking lay the penetrating London dust. He turned off the Embankment just short of Battersea Bridge into the wider and more fashionable streets. But the dust was there too. The houses were blank and silent, blinds and shutters closed, plants withering neglected in window-boxes; the road-ways vacant, arid, desolate. Lamentable sights claimed Colthurst's attention here also; at last, among others, the very lamentable though very common sight of a cat playing with a wounded mouse.

When he first remarked the creature, she was perfectly quiet, save for the tip of her tail softly lashing the grey flags; while the mouse deluded by her quietness, crawled from between her outstretched paws to reach imaginary shelter in the gutter under the edge of the kerb stone. For a second or two the cat let the fugitive be; rolled over and over in rather diabolical gaiety, with those queer feline chucklings of enjoyment that it is quite the reverse of comfortable to hear. Then she found her feet, leapt lightly after the mouse which had just gained the gutter. And Colthurst, though by no means the most sentimentally soft-hearted of men, turned sick, as he saw the poor

little beast sit up on end, squeaking thinly sharp as a slate pencil squeaks when you draw it upright across a slate, and strike out right and left at the cat's great, grinning, whiskered face with its tiny fragile-fingered paws.

Colthurst felt mad against the cat, forgetting that, as cats go, she was really quite within her rights, for in her dealings with the mouse he read a rather ghastly parable. So he struck at her too, tried to drive her off; but she proved too quick for him, nipped up the shrieking mouse in her white teeth, and bounded away across the road and down between the area railings of a house opposite. Colthurst followed her, a singular necessity upon him to witness the end of the tragedy, and as he did so the aspect of the house in question arrested his attention. It was painted pale blue, its window-boxes were fresh, still charming with flowers, the dust seemed to have found no lodging-place upon it or them. With a sensation at once happy and sinister, Colthurst perceived it was Mary Crookenden's house—the house he had once visited, and from which he had been ejected rather ingloriously, thanks to Madame Jacobini's liberal use of the snuffers.

For some minutes he paused in the middle of the silent roadway. This morning he had reached the bottom of his great discontent; now the reaction came, as in such a nature it was bound to come. For the rage of living had suffered but temporary abatement in Colthurst. He shook himself queerly as though actually to shake off and rid himself of the lethargy that held him.

'After all,' he said, 'a mouse, here and there, must make good its escape. Perhaps, after all, Fate has not loaded the dice. I will try one throw more, for the chance of salvation through the love of a pure woman. Injustice may go far, but it can hardly dare strike her to compass my punishment. That would be too flagrant.'

And then, thinking of Mary Crookenden, Colthurst's flesh cried out for her; and not his flesh only—for Satan tempting him had at least the grace to tempt him through the nobler as well as the baser side of his nature—all that which was spiritual in him, ambitious of what is lovely and of good report, cried out for her too. He went across the dusty road, a tremendous revulsion of feeling upon him. Rang, enquired for her, learnt she had rented a cottage down in Surrey for the summer.

Colthurst took the first hansom he could find and rattled down to Waterloo. He would go and see Mary Crookenden; ask her to be his saviour, ask her to be his wife. He told himself he had been scrupulous to the point of mania. He must have her; for she only could save him, save in the truest and deepest sense, his life.

Out in the country there was sunshine, a rich profound green of woods, and gold of corn-lands. Out in the country there were no grotesque and sinister sights, no clinging, choking soil of dust. As the train whirled away through the sunny landscape, Colthurst was filled by a glorious renewal of hope. And yet he remembered, though he fought against the remembrance, how, while he stood on Miss Crookenden's

doorstep, he had heard the cat growling to herself down in the area as she crunched up the mouse.

Chapter VI.

Do you know what it is to love and be loved? Do you know—not by hearsay merely, but by experience—this absorption of the life of one human being in another, the one man in the one woman, the one woman in the one man? For the time they, each to each, alike the centre and the sum, the very end and purpose of creation; the rest vague, phantasmal, —they, each to each, the only abiding reality. For the time they, each through the other, possessors and interpreters of all things; this immense universe a setting merely, the sights and sounds, the glory and wonder of it, but ministers to their delight in one another. For them stars rise and set, and the wheat waves under the summer wind. For them the sea grows white westward, at evening, meeting the sky in long embrace. For them all fair pictures are painted; all songs sung; and even common things become instinct with a strange sacramental grace. For them the oracles are no longer dumb, the mysteries lie open, they walk with the gods.

This is the crown and triumph of the riddle of sex; wherein, for the time, the long torment, shame and anguish of it is forgotten, so that man's curse becomes, for the time, his most exquisite blessing—a blessing in which body and spirit equally participate. Whether, rightly considered, we here touch divinest

revelation or most malign illusion, who shall say? But, for the time, that is a detail; for the illusion, if illusion it be, is complete.

Colthurst lay—not on his stomach on a dusty London bench—but on his back in the springy heather, his hands clasped under his head, looking up at the mackeral sky. Somewhere far away in the depth of the wood, a wood-pigeon cooed, cooed—most reposeful of natural sounds. And now and again a draught of air hushed through the fir-trees, and stirred the delicate foliage of the birches fringing the edge of the plantation. Mary Crookenden sat very still, her feet crossed, her hands in her lap. A long slanting ray of sunlight, from between the ruddy trunks of the firs crowning the ridge behind her, gilded the shadowed brightness of her hair. In the hollow, some few yards below, was a shallow moorland pond. And her eyes, fixed on the smooth surface of the clear brown water, were lustrous, serious, with a great content.

For this was one of those good hours when love grows perfect to the casting out of fear. She had no dread of the man lying there on the heath beside her. His strength no longer oppressed her as it formerly had done. It semed to buoy her up, she rejoiced in it. Just now the troubles that her choice involved, the opposition of relations, the possible severance of old friendships, her Aunt Caroline's inevitable anger, Lancelot's inevitable distress, all the talk that the announcement of this new engagement following so hard on the heels of that other broken one necessarily provoked—these were for-

gotten. Only the mellow serenity of the September evening, the magical charm that haunted the still woods, the dry warmth of the light moorland air, the sense of the man's great love encircling, upholding her, remained. And that love now was not fettering, constraining, impeding; for she had yielded herself up to it with a fulness which had converted it from bondage to freedom. Mary Crookenden had never been more self-secure, more serenely proud in the days of her loneliness than now when she had given her heart irrevocably into another's keeping.

A couple of big red dragon-flies flashed hither and thither over the little brown pond, on the smooth surface of which the blue sky, dappled with cloud, was reflected. A swarm of gnats danced upward, in a tall, shifting sunny pillar. A sighing passed through the upper branches of the Scotch-firs. The wood-pigeon ceased cooing. Mary turned sideways, rested her right hand on the heath just beyond Colthurst's shoulder, leaned right across between him and the sky, looked down at him with triumphant fearlessness.

'Are you happy?' she asked.

'Divinely,' Colthurst answered.

'Are you satisfied?'

'Almost,' he said.

The girl bent her beautiful head and kissed him, smiling with a certain gentle gravity.

'Now are you satisfied?'

'Ah! my beloved, my beloved,' Colthurst murmured. 'Ah! my beloved,—your face and behind it the eternity of that blue sky.—No, there are only two

more things to ask for—the day and night that make you my wife, and then—then if it might be—last and best gift of God, d-death, "delicate death." '

Mary drew back.

'Then you're not happy after all,' she said. 'For the last thing one asks being happy, is to die.'

'I d-don't know about that,' Colthurst said.

'But you must be happy,' the girl insisted. 'What more can I do to make you so?'

'N-nothing, except never change, never love me less.'

There was a silence before Mary spoke. Her eyes were on the quiet little brown pond, and again from the heart of the wood came the soft cooing note of the pigeon.

'I can never love you less, because to me you and love are one and the same.' The girl's face flushed. 'I can't think of it apart from you, or you apart from it,' she said.

Colthurst raised himself on his elbow; and, while he looked up at her, for one of the first and last times in his life his eyes filled with tears.

'And yet,' he said presently, stammering suddenly —'yet I am not the m-man you ought to have loved, whom you ought to marry. Sometimes, even now, I have a hideous d-dread that you have stepped off the right lines of your nature, that you will find out that you have suffered a d-delusion, and then—then' —Colthurst laid his hand on her knee—'my p-precious one, are you sure you've counted the cost?'

'There is no cost, now,' the girl said.

'Not here and to-day, perhaps, but later? You

may come to hear things about me. P-people may tell you ugly stories.'

'I shall not believe them.'

'But I have lived hard,' Colthurst went on. 'It's true. I have got scars, n-nasty scars. As time goes on you may happen to see them, they'll shock you, disgust you perhaps.'

Mary shook her head, still looking at the bright shifting pillar of dancing gnats.

'B-but they are not honourable scars, many of them. I got them fighting in no particularly glorious battles.'

Colthurst stretched his hand further, laid it on her hands as they rested on her lap.

'You m-must understand now—it is right you should understand, though it is dreadful to me to tell you. B-before I knew you, I was vicious, I was p-profligate. I never d-drank, but only because drink never happened to tempt me. And I never scamped my work either, b-because till I knew you it was the only thing I really loved. But the sins that did tempt me, I committed. And sometimes the remembrance of them rise up hot in me, and defiles all the present. And then I feel guilty of sacrilege in b-being near you, in touching you, in letting you kiss me as—bless you for doing it—you kissed me just now.'

Colthurst's hand closed down on hers, gripping them until he almost pained her.

'You have r-raised me,' he said. 'You have brought my whole life up to a higher level. B-but still the Ethiopian can't change his skin or the leopard its

spots. I shall do and say that at times, however careful I am, which must be displeasing to you, which must offend your taste.'

His grip on her hands tightened. A strong desire was upon him, it had grown and grown during the past month of close intercourse—to make a clean breast of it and tell her all; for the more he delighted in her the more he recoiled from dealing dishonestly with her. And yet how was it possible, plainly and positively, to tell her this thing?

'I have been penniless, and that leaves a scar, leaves an abiding distrust of the good faith of fortune, even when she comes to one, as she has come to me lately, all b-broad smiles, and her lap full of gifts. I have starved.'

'Ah!' cried the girl, with a little movement towards him.

Colthurst smiled at her. Her pity was very lovely. But he went on.

'Yes, it is not agreeable to starve. That leaves a scar too. It makes you envious, makes you cruel, makes you feel murderously towards your well-fed fellow-creatures.' He paused a moment.—'I have herded with outcasts. Have been dependent—God forgive me, for I didn't know where the cursed money came from then—upon the earnings of a common——'

But Mary, almost violently, drew her hands away.

'You hurt me,' she said.

She rose to her feet, moved slowly down over the carpet of purple heather, and stood, a tall, slim, stately young figure, on the shore of the little pond.

Then Colthurst's purpose melted into thin air. For all his life, all the worth and purpose of it was bound up with this woman; he clung to her as the devotee clings to his god. There was an almost superstitious element in his love; even momentary alienation such as this gave him a sense of despair. Surely, he reasoned, things having gone thus far, his first duty now lay in preserving her peace of mind? Surely the burden of self-accusation, the burden of disclosure, was lifted off him if she thus refused to hear? He waited a minute watching her, undecided. The gnats danced on and the pigeon cooed; and the light became more ruddily golden as the sun sunk behind the firs, making their branches glow like living flame. Then he went down and stood near her beside the little pond. And out of the clear brown water her face looked up at him pale, questioning, sad. Colthurst was cut to the heart.

'I'm a b-brute,' he said, in that quick, urgent, whispering way of his, 'a selfish brute to have troubled your sweet soul with the story of my bad days. Thanks to you, those b-bad days are over, for —for ever. We will b-blot them out of remembrance; from now they shall be as though they were not, never had been. Forget all I was mad enough to say, put it away from you. And forgive me, Mary, as you love me—if, indeed, you do love me—forgive me. Trust me, my darling, I will never pain you like this again.'

Colthurst stretched out his arms to the fair image in the water; and as he did so, the face looking up

at him lost its sadness, began to smile with a certain grave tenderness.

'My b-beloved,' he stammered, greatly moved, 'my beloved.'

Just then a ripple passed across the surface of the pond, breaking and distorting the reflection; but that was of slight moment to Colthurst, for he held the woman herself in his arms. Her head was on his shoulder, her heart beat against his heart.

'I do love you,' she said, 'I can't help myself. I don't want to help myself. Whatever you may have done, whatever has happened to you—I can't help myself—it makes no difference. Only please don't tell me, that can do no good, and—I'm cowardly—I'd rather not know.'

And Colthurst put his hand on her white throat as her head lay back on his shoulder and swore a great oath she should never know. To save her from that foul knowledge he would lie, and if needs be do worse than lie. For his passion made him wholly unscrupulous just then, reckless, blind to all obligation, but the one of sheltering her. And he hated Jenny Parris, hated the thought of her, hated the fact of her existence, with a consuming hatred. For her, crossing Mary Crookenden's happiness, he had no mercy. She must be obliterated, and, along with remembrance of his old bad days, utterly blotted out.

Half way home, on the edge of the great common—where the moorland ends and civilisation and its restraints in the shape of banks, and lanes, and high-roads begin—Colthurst stopped. Critical common-sense as represented by Madame Jacobini was wait-

ing, as he only too fully realized along with other restraints of civilisation, just ahead. He looked at the young girl earnestly, almost fiercely through the dimness of the mellow September dusk.

'You are satisfied?' he asked in his turn. 'You have no regrets?'

Mary shook her head. 'Now, none,' she said.

'Now, yes. But to-morrow, next day?' Colthurst demanded.

Mary glanced round. They were alone, but for the long dark stretches of the moorland, the churring of the night-jar, the round-headed oak trees in the hedge. And, so thoroughly had the great god Love taught our proud, milk-white maiden his strange lesson, that she took Colthurst's face in both hands, drew it down, kissed him once again on the lips.

'For those who love as we do, as long as they are together it is always now,' she said. 'So that to-morrow and the day after matter not one little bit. Only don't ask to die, my dearest, just as you are making me understand all that it may be to live.'

BOOK VII.—THE WAGES ARE PAID.

'Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee and thou with me;
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we risk the ship, ourselves and all.'—WALT WHITMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE philosophy of the point of view is a great and illuminating philosophy; but it tends somewhat to the promotion of pessimism, showing, as it does, the permanent and surprisingly great gulf fixed between one human mind and another. For instance, while James Colthurst and Mary were thus interpreting creation by means of their love for one another, that love struck some persons as an anything but desirable piece of business.

Mrs. Crookenden settled her large shoulders back in her wicker chair, planted on the gravel just outside the Slerracombe greenhouse, and addressed her brother-in-law in tones of profound displeasure.

'My dear Kent,' she said, 'it is useless to attempt to explain away the disagreeables of this new departure on poor Mary's part. This is the climax of a long course of—you must excuse my saying so plainly—most extraordinary and inconsiderate conduct; and shows a most lamentable disregard of other people's feelings.'

Mrs. Crookenden folded her hands, with their array of handsome rings, over her crochet, and drew her chin in.

'It is most unbecoming, most unbecoming.'

The Rector was in low spirits. His tongue had lost the keenness of its edge. And he found nothing better to reply than—'Well, if she is making a mistake, poor child, she will be chief sufferer by it, in any case.'

Mrs. Crookenden, gratified by this indirect concession, picked up her crochet again, and continued calmly:—

'Breaking off her engagement to Mr. Aldham was bad enough, caused discomfort and annoyance enough, I am sure. Poor dear Miss Aldham can't get over it. It is quite sad to see her. And most awkward for me. She sent for me the other day, and, I'm sure, I did not know what to say. You see the engagement had been made so very public, he had gone about with Mary so much. Everyone knew about it. I consider her behaviour perfectly unpardonable.'

'You would have preferred her marrying Aldham and being more or less miserable?' the Rector inquired.

'If she was miserable it would have been entirely her own fault. She would have had an excellent position. Mr. Aldham is a most thorough gentleman. I really don't know what right Mary has to ask more than that. Most girls in her circumstances would be only too thankful to make such a good marriage. Mary has a most undue opinion of her own importance, I am afraid,'—Mrs. Crookenden folded her

hands again,—but then she has been spoilt, dreadfully spoilt.'

The Rector drew little patterns, crosses and squares and intersecting circles, upon the gray shingly gravel with the point of his walking-stick.

'Yes, perhaps I have been to blame,' he said, quietly. 'There's no fool like an old fool, you know, Caroline. Very likely I have done Mary more than one ill-service, fancied I was going the way to make her young life pleasant when I was really only pampering myself.'—His mouth twitched into a rather harsh smile.—'More than half the love for our friends and neighbours on which we plume ourselves so much, proves to be nothing better than self-love when we run it to earth. Egotism is a slippery customer, difficult to catch, it doubles and turns like a hare.'

Mrs. Crookenden congratulated herself, she really found her brother-in-law surprisingly reasonable and amenable this afternoon. And this praiseworthy frame of mind of his raised her hopes; for Mrs. Crookenden once having conceived a purpose did not easily relinquish it. Placid-natured people are usually obstinate. All through these years she had clung to her original scheme for the disposal of the Rector's hand and heart. Lady Dorothy Hellard still unmated, continued to trot after her very tough old mother, the dowager Lady Combmartin, up and down this troublesome world. Mrs. Crookenden cherished a belief that only her brother-in-law's exaggerated devotion to his niece, had prevented poor Lady Dorothy's tired middle-aged feet trotting into the

open door of Brattleworthy Rectory and there finding rest long ago; and in proportion as Mary got out of favour, it appeared to her that such highly desirable trotting might even yet be effected. She therefore amiably proceeded to blacken the young lady to the best of her ability.

'My dear Kent, pray don't run away with the idea that I think any blame attaches to you,' she said, graciously. 'Everybody has combined to spoil poor Mary, and put her rather out of her place. And then I never can admit that Madame Jacobini is quite refined and so on, don't you know. I always feared she might put very odd ideas on certain subjects into a girl's head. And, I think, it has proved so. But all that doesn't lessen my feeling about Mary's behaviour to you.'

'Behaviour to me?' the Rector inquired, quickly.

'Yes, in making a marriage you disapprove of, after all your extraordinary generosity to her.'

'You take my disapproval for granted; but I have expressed none, as far as I am aware.'

Mrs. Crookenden moved in her chair with slight impatience.

'Of course you disapprove, everyone must disapprove who has Mary's welfare at all at heart,' she said, in her large official manner. 'She had the chance of making an extremely good marriage, and in a fit of caprice throws it all aside for the sake of some extraordinary artist, drawing-master sort of person, whom—well, really whom one knows nothing in the world about.'

The Rector began to cheer up. His sister-in-law

became amusing. To her, he knew, as to such a very large section of our fellow country men and women, the arts are and always will be, I suppose—it belongs to the Anglo-Saxon race—pretty much a matter either of dancing dogs or the finishing governess.

'It is a very odd marriage for a girl who has had her advantages, a very poor marriage.'

'Mr. Colthurst is prepared to make better settlements than I anticipated,' the Rector said.

Then Mrs. Crookenden saw her opportunity, she spread all her canvas. In she sailed.

'I am delighted to hear it. Because then I really do hope and trust, my dear Kent, that you will begin to think a little more of yourself. I consider that your life has been completely sacrificed to Mary's extravagance, and to her pleasure. Now I do trust you will not make her that enormous allowance any longer. If she marries this man, let her live in a way suited to her position. She has some money of her own; that and what he makes—I suppose that sort of person really makes a good deal—ought to be quite enough for her. It must be enough for her. You ought to be set free.'

Mrs. Crookenden glanced at her brother-in-law. She never felt quite safe with him, somehow, when it came to close quarters. And his aspect just now was not encouraging; his under jaw protruded, and his eyes followed the geometrical figures he described on the gravel with the point of his stick. Mrs. Crookenden disliked extremely to see the gravel made untidy, but she dominated her sense of annoyance.

'Let her begin at a suitable level,' she went on.

'Who is to determine what level is suitable?' the Rector inquired.

'Oh! that is easily determined by the amount of her income—her own real income. And, meanwhile, my dear Kent, you must begin to live at the level of your real income.'

'Buy more tobacco than I can smoke, more books than I can read, more horses than I can ride,' he said. 'I increase my establishment, collect a number of greedy servants about me, and give them nothing to do? —No thank you, Caroline. I am better as I am.'

'There are other ways of spending money,' Mrs. Crookenden said. 'My dear Kent, the subject is not an easy one to approach with you. But you know how orten I have tried to speak to you about it.'

The Rector leaned back in his chair.

'What subject?' he inquired.

'That of marriage.'

Mrs. Crookenden paused. The Rector doubled himself together and fell to drawing those, to his companion, very irritating patterns again.

'Yes, he said, 'I daresay it is difficult to approach. We all shelter ourselves, you know, Caroline, as best we can; are most stand-offish where perhaps we feel most strongly. Frankly the subject of marriage is an unwelcome one to me. I'd rather leave it alone. But let me just state my opinion to you plainly. A marriage of reason has always appeared to me a wretched travesty of—well, of a very beautiful thing; a travesty so wretched, that no person respecting his

own intelligence could be guilty of lending himself to it. For the only justification of the very peculiar relationship we take so calmly for granted under this name of marriage, is love. And for a man of my age to fall in love is little short of indecent.'

'Really, Kent,' Mrs. Crookenden exclaimed. She was very much shocked.

'Therefore,' he went on, 'though I regret Mary's choice in some ways, I have acquiesced both in her breaking with Aldham, and in her present engagement. She is making a considerable venture, I know; probably there are difficulties for her ahead. My object is to make those difficulties as little irksome as possible in the only way I can, namely by securing her a comfortable and sufficient income quite independent of her'—the word stuck in his throat—'of her husband. She will, therefore, receive precisely the same allowance she always has received.'

'She ought at least to know that it is an allowance, and not her own,' Mrs. Crookenden said. 'She ought to be told the truth.'

The Rector completed a very elaborate curly-cue on the grey gravel.

'I shall not tell her, and, pardon my saying so, I shall be seriously annoyed if anyone else does so.'—His tone changed, he turned to his companion very courteously.—'You have always been a kind friend to me, Caroline, and in this little matter you will respect my wishes, I feel sure.'

He leaned back, stuck his chin out, and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat.

'We all have our trifle of romance,' he said. 'And

my trifle happens to be bound up with Polly. It will remain bound up with her to the end of the chapter. —Now let us talk about something else. What news have you of Lance?'

Mrs. Crookenden had picked up her crochet. The enamelled lockets rattled rather aggressively as the tortoise-shell needle made its way through the white wool.

'He was about to start home,' she said.

'Hearing Polly was free, eh?' inquired the Rector.

'I am sure I don't know if that was his reason. If it was, he will find letters at Bombay which will disabuse his mind of that idea. I have urged him, under the circumstances, to adhere to his original plan, to continue travelling with Mr. Quayle.'

'I'm afraid he won't obey you. If I know Lance, this last news will only make him come home the quicker.'

For a minute or two Mrs. Crookenden worked on silently at her crochet. Then she remarked, with truly alarming severity,—

'I must say Mary gives an immense amount of trouble to all who have the misfortune of being connected with her.'

The Rector's thin lips twitched and turned down oddly at one corner.

'That's been the way of pretty women from the beginning of history,' he said.

Mrs. Crookenden moved her mouth as though she had a bad taste in it. Sometimes she thought, she was sorry but she could not help it, that Kent was

really rather coarse—but then after all there was a suspicion of that, you know, in all the Crookendens.

Chapter II.

The summer was past. The leaves were falling. The fogs had begun. The Connop School had re-opened. Colthurst worked hard at this period. In addition to the regular routine of school work he had a large picture on the stocks, and a portrait of Mary Crookenden. The painting of this last gave him profound pleasure, intellectual as well as of the heart. He has put all his skill, all his love, all his divination of Mary's character into the painting of that picture. It remains a thing by itself. The public have had no opportunity of seeing it as yet; when it is seen it must add solidly to Colthurst's reputation.

Yet he has not attempted to paint Miss Crookenden in what the majority of her admirers would have considered her best looks. For he went back on his old first impression of her. He has painted her pale, the brownish-red tinge almost suggestive of tears upon her eyelids and a solemnity in her beautiful eyes. He had painted the tired, troubled child whom he met years ago on the hillside, the fair, sad face which looked up at him out of the brown moorland pool; not the triumphant young beauty whose appearance society for some three or four seasons so relished. The snow is there, and that strange promise—to him so royally fulfilled of late—of fire beneath the snow; but of Miss Crookenden as an exquisite and rather

heartless taker of scalps there is, I am happy to say, no trace. Her moonlight beauty is sweet, pathetic, touched with a peculiar and subtle charm. In short, the portrait is great as the revelation of a nature—which, after all, is the highest way in which any portrait can be great.

But behind Colthurst's love, behind his work both private and public, still lay the unsolved problem of Jenny Parris. He had had no explanation with her; intended to have none until his marriage was an accomplished fact. He meant to go to her then and tell her, as concisely as possible, that the thing was done. This was cruel, perhaps. But Colthurst did not care. To shield Mary was his increasing and solitary wish; and he watched over her with jealous care, knew all she did, everywhere she went, guarded her at every point, as he trusted, from unpleasant surprises, unpleasant hints. Meanwhile, to keep Jenny away from London was evidently desirable. Regularly every week during the past summer—for Colthurst was curiously methodical in some matters—he had forwarded her allowance via Captain Prust. Finally he wrote to her advising her wintering on the south coast for health's sake. He knew there would be a certain danger in making this suggestion. Ten to one it would have precisely the reverse effect to that he intended, Jenny having a pernicious disposition to do exactly what she was asked not to do. Still it was incumbent upon him to make the suggestion, both for her own and for safety's sake. Colthurst received no answer to his letter.

In point of fact, Jenny, after long hungering for

some recognition, some sign from him beyond that inevitable weekly sum of money—which in her unreasoning, hot-headed way she had come to hate—finding his letter contained no tenderness, gave no hope of softening on his part, tore it up, in a passion of misery; and then, poor impulsive soul, sewed the fragments of it—as a sort of amulet—into a corner of the piece of red flannel she wore to protect her chest. And further, she proceeded to pack the paper-parcels, band-boxes, and sea-chest, notwithstanding Dot's tears and angry protests. She must go away, go back to Delamere Crescent; for there, at least, it was possible to get at him, to send for him, if the worst came to the worst. With her usual luck, she lighted on a streaming day for her journey, and caught a cold on the Bishopstoke platform changing trains, which speedily undid the good her long sojourn by the seaside had done her.

So, by the middle of October, Jenny was back in her old quarters again, Colthurst ignorant of the fact, she ignorant of his changed prospects. And thus things might have remained, but for the gentleman connected with the dramatic profession—the music-hall artist, in plain English—who happened at this period to rent Mrs. Prust's drawing-room floor. For, returning in the small hours, his morning sleep was a great consequence to the gentleman in question; and that racking, straining cough of Jenny's in the room immediately below—it usually came on badly when she woke bathed in perspiration between four and five o'clock—so disturbed his slumbers, that he had to complain to Mrs. Prust. The good woman, with a

handsome disregard of monetary considerations, took him up rather short; informing him that there were plenty of other apartments to let both ends of the Crescent, so if hers didn't give satisfaction, he had best suit himself elsewhere.

'For,' she added, blinking and gurgling with emotion as she proceeded downstairs after the interview, 'the poor young thing shan't be drove out of this house, cough or no cough, as long as me and the Capt'n's above ground.'

Jenny's cough not mending, however, the gentleman belonging to the dramatic profession took Mrs. Prust at her word and sought another domicile. Mrs. Prust had the magnanimity not to disclose the cause of his abrupt departure; but, since the balance must be kept and excess of kindness in one direction of necessity begets defect in another, by a process of logic peculiar to herself she elected to hold Colthurst responsible for the loss of her lodger. She, therefore, once again, without consulting Jenny, despatched her reluctant master mariner to Wentworth Street in search of him, bearing a notification of Jenny's condition and a request 'that Mr. Colthurst would be pleased to lose no time in coming and looking into it all himself.'

But the message did not get itself delivered till next morning; for Colthurst was dining in St. George's Road. It was a very happy little dinner, the happier, perhaps, because Madame Jacobini had a headache which prevented her appearing until afterwards in the drawing-room. Colthurst was singularly brilliant that night; he had forgotten the great cat Fate and

her random selection of victims. He talked his best, was full of energy, of schemes for coming pictures; his hesitating, urgent speech was unusually effective, varied, eloquent. Antony Hammond and Mr. Carr, who happened to come in for an hour during the course of the evening, both left under the spell of his wonderful force and vitality, left with the sense of having assisted at a rather superb exhibition of intellectual and artistic activity. Even Madame Jacobini was carried off her feet.

'Good heavens, my dear child,' she exclaimed, when he went away at last; 'but with the best will in the world to think otherwise, I must own that your Tartar is fascinating, when he pleases—absolutely fascinating. And it is not only his talk, for one has a conviction the creature will be as good as his word. He inspires one with a really marvellous confidence in his powers.

Mary laughed. It appeared to her, also, that 'the creature' was magnificently capable, and that there was an ever new delight in loving and being loved by him.

But though—to make use once more of his own rather pagan illustration—though Colthurst might forget the great cat Fate, she had not forgotten him. Who, indeed, does she ever forget, if it comes to that? For while he dined with Miss Crookenden in St. George's Road, Captain Prust, arriving at the moment of the meal, sat down to supper with the landlady and her daughter in Wentworth Street. And the latter, as thank-offering for much nautical anecdote, supplied him with information of an extremely interest-

ing character.—This would be about the last of his journeys here, they supposed, in search of Mr. Colthurst. Why didn't he—Captain Prust—know? And then followed the current gossip. An heiress—for Mr. Colthurst knew how to feather his own nest, it seemed—the lady's name, a decidedly exaggerated account of her wealth and position, and how she had come more than once in her own carriage to leave a note; her direction, too, but they weren't sure of the number.

As he went home with that rolling, sea-faring gait of his, Captain Prust took his pipe out of his mouth more than once, and exclaimed aloud:

'Lord love you, whatever will S'lome say? S'lome 'll raise a breeze will S'lome, and let him have it hot somehow.'

But someone with greater capacity—in the present case—for 'letting him have it hot' than even Mrs. Prust, notwithstanding that good lady's gifts of statement, took this matter in hand. For the next afternoon, though there was a drizzling leaden-grey fog and though she had hardly been out of the house since her return, Jenny herself sallied forth. Dot teazed to go too, but her mother bade her stay at home in a tone which rather surprised that forthcoming and coercive little person. First Jenny visited the newsagent, who kept the post-office two streets off and with his assistance made out a certain address from the directory. Then she went away slowly through the chill of the dreary late autumn day, holding the fur shoulder-cape, she wore over her claret-coloured ulster, together across her aching chest;

breathing with difficulty in the thick atmosphere, stopping now and again to fight down a fit of coughing; yet carrying her head erect, moving with some of her old, statuesque grace, supported by the terrible purpose she had at heart. Several times she lost herself, for the fog grew denser as the afternoon advanced, and it was not easy to read the names of the streets—overshot the turning she wanted, made her way back again, found the house at last.

Jenny stood on the pavement looking up at it. A soft glow came through the lace curtains of the drawing-room windows; even from the outside it had an effect of luxury which bitterly incensed her. She leaned against the right-hand pillar of the portico to recover her breath. The clammy cold of the fog wrapped her round like a wet sheet, until she shivered; yet the stifling, choking pain at her chest made her long for more air, not less. For respiration is hardly comfortable work when you have spit up the larger half of one lung and the vessels of the other are clogged by matter and blood.

As she waited in the heavy leaden greyness, a brougham drove up, and almost immediately the house door opened disclosing a perspective of warm colour and subdued light within. A young lady came the length of the hall, out on to the steps, and then turned to give some message to the maid holding open the door. Jenny had a full view of her. She saw a woman, tall, richly dressed, mistress of herself, and perfectly finished from head to heel as only women of the leisured classes can be—have time and money to be. Saw a lovely face, with a sort of lofty gladness

in its expression, as of one who carries store of some great happiness constantly about with her. For the moment she was almost awed, almost moved to pity; this woman was so young, so serene, so very fair. But jealousy such as Jenny's knows neither fear or mercy for long. From the first she did not question Mary's identity; and the contrast between herself, ill, worn, wretched, spoilt, standing on the greasy pavement, and this exquisite child of good fortune, was too glaring. It infuriated Jenny, it inspired her with the daring and the dignity of intolerable wrong. She shook back her head, swept forward, stood at the bottom of the steps, the light from the open hall door falling upon her. She looked full, aggressively at Mary, as the latter prepared to descend the steps.

'You'm Miss Crookenden?' she said.

The young lady startled, slightly annoyed, bowed a sufficiently haughty assent.

'Then I'm bound to speak to you,' Jenny added.

This handsome, battered woman, her appearance at once showy and shabby, her bearing almost insolent, her manner almost authoritative, was displeasing to Miss Crookenden from every point of view.

'I think you are under some mistake,' she replied. 'I am not aware that I know you.'

'No, you don't know me, and that's where it is,' Jenny returned. 'You'm bound to know me, to know all about me.'

Mary tried to retain her cold indifference of manner, but the incident was unexpected to the point of embarrassment and she spoke with a certain haste.

'I cannot stay to hear what you may have to say now, I have an engagement. As you see, the carriage is waiting. I am going out. And I have no idea on what subject you can possibly require to speak to me.'

Jenny came up two steps, came close to her.

'I want to speak to you about the man you'm going to marry—about James Colthurst,' she said.

An indeterminate, vague horror seemed to pass before Mary Crookenden.

'I do not discuss Mr. Colthurst with strangers,' she replied.

'I'm no stranger,' Jenny said, contemptuously. 'Jim and me have been pretty intimate for a sight of years now.'

And then, in obedience to one of those swift changes of feeling which made her at once so impossible and —in a way—so fine, Jenny, seeing the growing fear in the young face before her, spoke indulgently, as one speaks to a child.

'There, I don't want to hurt you more'n I can help,' she said. 'And it ain't fit for such as you to be standing here talking to me in the street. You'm bound to hear it all sooner or later, best get it over at once. Send away your carriage, and let me come inside.'

Swallowing the cold, damp air as she talked provoked Jenny's cough. She leaned one hand on the balustrade of the portico now for support, for the exertion of coughing doubled her together and made her unsteady on her feet.

'It'll pass,' she gasped, 'after a bit. Only let me come inside. I won't keep you longer than I must.—

It'll be pretty rough on both of us—but let me come in. The fog's killing and I am awful tired. Let me rest a bit.'

Mary Crookenden debated; and then, moved by the sight of the woman's sad condition, moved by that indeterminate horror—to which any certainty, however damaging, seemed preferable—making a sign to Jenny to follow, turned and went into the house.

'If anyone calls I am engaged,' she said to the amazed and discreetly blank-faced Hannah. 'Remember I see no one until I ring. The carriage can go back to the stables; if I want it I will send round later.'

She led the way into the dining-room. The shaded lamp hanging over the dinner table was already lighted, and the table laid for three. Colthurst dined with the two ladies again to-night, dined early, as they proposed going to the theatre. Her own picture looked at Mary with an odd fixedness—so it seemed—from its easel in a shadowy corner of the charming, tasteful room. She stood just out of the circle of light cast by the lamp. She pulled off her gloves, locked her hands together, her attitude strained, her face unresponsive, set like a mask.

'You had better sit down,' she said, 'since you are tired. And please oblige me by telling me what you wish to tell me briefly and at once.'

Jenny took the nearest chair, perforce, for she had not strength to stand and talk both. It happened to be the one set at the table for Colthurst. Mary bit her lip. It was all she could do to prevent crying out.—Then Jenny glanced round the room delib-

erately; glanced at the portrait in the shadowy corner, at the silver, the dainty glass, the dessert and heaped up flowers upon the dinner table, finally fastened her eyes upon the girl herself.

'Jim knows well enough what he's about as usual,' she said; and her jealousy, her sense of the immense contrast between her own lot and that of her companion, became well night insupportable. She leaned back in her chair, resting both wrists on the table, and stated her case against Colthurst baldly, mercilessly, without gradation, without those extenuating circumstances which put so wholly different a complexion upon some phases at all events of her miserable history. But jealousy and envy raised the devil in poor Jenny Parris. She struck and struck again, caring nothing how or where she struck so long as she drew blood.

'You want to have it short—very well, then, here it is. My name's Jane Parris. I come from Beera Mills, over right Brattleworthy, where you Crookenden folks live. Jim painted me there, made me love him there, a dozen years ago. And Jim's like that, once care for him you can't get along without him. I couldn't stay when he was gone. I came up after him here to London.'

The red showed in a hard triangle on either of Jenny's hollow cheeks.

'You want to have it,' she repeated, flinging the short, gasping sentences at Mary Crookenden, with a growing violence. 'Well, then, listen here. He's kept me ever since, except when I've kept him. I've a child he's the father of. He keeps us still.'

And the sentences hit Mary Crookenden blow on blow till her imagination positively rocked under them. Still she managed to maintain a show of outward calm.

'You make these dreadful assertions, but you bring no proof,' she said, proudly. 'I have nothing beyond your bare word for their truth. Till I have more than that I shall not believe them.'

Yet even while she spoke Mary's mind misgave her. All Colthurst's allusions to a shame and wretchedness in his life, his old declaration that his love was hopeless, his later attempts to tell her that which she persistently refused to hear, Lancelot's hinted story—all these crowded into her mind, giving the woman's statements a distressing air of probability.

'If you don't believe me, ask Jim then,' Jenny replied. 'Jim's cruel hard by times, but I've never known him lie. He won't deny me and the child; I don't think that of him. And Cap'n and Mrs. Prust know all about it. And if you want proofs, I've got letters and things of his down to our place. And, if you want more, well, there's the child—if you don't believe me, I reckon you've only to look a bit at Dot.'

In her increasing excitement Jenny pulled off her hat, threw it down on the carpet beside her and with her left hand impatiently rubbed back the masses of her dark hair. She was very terrible just then in her coarsened beauty, her untidy attire, her broken health, her great sense of wrong. Mary saw her face clearly for the first time; saw it and alas! knew it,

wasted by disease, disfigured by passion though it was, for the face of the woman in Colthurst's great picture, the face of the woman of Slerracombe deer-park, and knowing it turned sick as death.

'Have you done?' she said. 'Because if so, go—go at once.'

Jenny swept the glasses, the fish knife and fork to left and right, pushed the basket-folded napkin back against the flowers, obliterated the place laid for Colthurst—for the man she loved, the man whom, in obedience to that love (so queerly does human affection display itself) she was now seeking to blast and dishonour—forgetting all his patience towards her, forgetting too—and let us not forget it, for sentiment in these lamentable cases is very much too prone to run amuck at the man, and range itself wholly and blindly on the side of the woman—forgetting that in the first instance she was at least as much to blame as he was, as much tempter as tempted, as ready to seduce as to yield to seduction. Then she rested her elbows on the table, her chin in both hands, and gazed fixedly once more at Miss Crookenden.

'No, I've not done yet,' she answered. 'For he's mine, he's mine by right, mine before Almighty God. Times and again he promised he'd marry me. And so I swore I'd come and tell you.'

'And you have told me,' Mary said. 'Now go.'

'But will you give him up?' Jenny demanded.

For a long minute the two looked across the dinner-table into each other's eyes.

'Till I know more, no,' Mary Crookenden said.

'Ah! you're a brave one,' Jenny cried. Then she

settled her chin in her hands again.—'All the same he's mine, I tell you. What'll you do for him against what I've done? Will you wash and mend and cook for him, stretch his canvasses, clean his palattes, stand for him the livelong day in your clothes and out of them?'

Mary made a movement of haughty repudiation. Jenny tossed back her head, and her voice, husky from that ailing throat and chest, grew fuller, deeper, with sheer force of defiant emotion.

'I've done that, and more than that,' she went on. 'When he was ill and times were bad, I've worked for him. I've stood model in all the studios worth naming in London, and Paris too for that matter. And the painters have been rarely pleased to get me, for I've had my share of good looks as well as the rest.—And I've done more'n that. Four years ago when he was took so ill it was summer time, and the schools were shut and most everyone was holiday-making, so trade was awful slack.'

Jenny paused, lowered her eyes, began playing nervously with Colthurst's fish knife and fork.

'But there's one trade at which a healthy woman can always make a living in a big town, worse luck. And Jim was awful bad. It was touch and go with him. We hadn't a brass farthing left.'

Her head went down into her hands, her shoulders heaved and shook.

'And Jim's not the man you'll let die if there's a way to help it. He's worth a sight too much. So I took to that trade. To keep him and the child alive I walked the cursed hell of those Paris streets.'

On those last words a long silence followed. Mary Crookenden stood perfectly still, a great sense of disgrace upon her, making her whole body burn and tingle from head to foot. For the gross bestial side of existence, the smallest hint of which all her life long she had so studiously and proudly ignored, from which she had turned so loftily away, suddenly lay bare and open before her. The corruption which runs below the seemly surface of our every-day life, even as sewers below some majestic city, the corruption which is a constant quantity in human nature, civilized and savage alike, suddenly sent up its stench into her nostrils. And so, just now, it was not her private grief, not the question of Colthurst's wrong-doing, his guilt or innocence in respect of this unhappy woman, not the question of his future relation to herself, which so appalled Mary Crookenden; rather was it this uncompromising revelation of the evil, ah! the infinite pity of it!—indissolubly joined, as beast with god, to that apparently best and dearest gift bestowed on mortals, the gift of love.

'The Lord'll forgive me,' Jenny murmured hoarsely, at last. 'I reckon He will, but I doubt Jim won't never forgive. Jim can't forget it. He always goes back on it. He's been changed to me ever since.'

After a while she raised her head, got on to her feet. Pushed back her hair languidly, tried to pin on her hat; but now that her passion was spent she felt her weakness doubly. The room turned with her, she was giddy and faint.

'I'll go. I've told you pretty well all, as I swore I'd tell any of you fine ladies who he might want to

marry. Now you know how it stands between him and me.'

Jenny lurched, laid hold of the back of the chair, sat down again.

'I'll go,' she repeated. 'But I feel mortal bad. I'm parched.'

A cut glass jug of iced water was standing on the table near her. She put out her hand, tried to raise it; but her wrist gave, the ice rattled and the water slopped over on to the cloth.—'Ah! dear heart,' Jenny exclaimed.

Then Mary Crookenden recovered herself, and putting a great force upon herself, came round from the further side of the table, took the claret glass that had been set for Colthurst, filled it with water, placed a dessert dish before the woman full of grapes.

'Eat—drink,' she said.

So far Jenny had thought only of herself, had acted under the dominion of her sense of injury alone. But the tone of Miss Crookenden's grave voice, the graciousness of her action, stirred the nobler spirit in poor Jenny. And as she looked up at the girl, and saw the proudly glad face of less than an hour ago cruelly altered, rigid and ghastly as that of a corpse, she understood something of the immense suffering she had inflicted, repented, was overcome by remorse.

'No, no,' she said, pushing away the grapes. 'I'll go—I must go. I'm not so bad but what I can walk, and it's not fitting I should eat or drink in this house.'

She rose, went through the warm, bright hall, opened the street door. Then she gave a great cry,

for there against the blurred, shifting, mournful dimness of the fog was Colthurst's tall, high-shouldered figure.

'Ah! you are here, you've seen her, you have taken your revenge at last. D-damn you, damn you, d-damn you, Jenny Parris,' he said.

Chapter III.

At sea it was a wild night, and on land it was not much better. The half-dozen small slate-roofed houses that cluster about the four roads at Beera Cross were shut up, only a square of redness here and there, through a curtain tight-strained behind the flower-pots, across their little windows. The Brattleworthy carrier's van stops to set down passengers, on its way back from Yeomouth, three times a week at the Cross about eight o'clock. And Jenny Parris staggered, as she stepped out of that close-packed, jolting, rattling vehicle.

This was one of her impulsive escapades, one of her mad revolts against circumstance and conditions. All other comfort failing, her heart had turned in unreasoning desire towards her own people, her own country. It had seemed to her that once down in the West all would be changed, health and beauty would come back; for poor Jenny was incurably hopeful even at this pass. And so, not as repentant prodigal but as seeker after her lost youth, she had left Delamere Crescent that morning, left kindly Mrs. Prust tearful, shaking her head. And as the train brought

her further and further westward, as the soft air caressed her cheek, the fine-featured, high-coloured West country folk met her eye, the glib familiar speech met her ear, Jenny's spirits rose. She had felt unusually well to-day, the dragging weight of illness had become less burdensome.—Dave would be good to her, father would be good to her. The path of life, which for so long now had run persistently downhill, would turn, begin to ascend disclosing pleasant prospects. She longed, with a foolish, unreasoning, heart-sick longing, for the smell of the sea, longed to handle the herring nets, longed to hear the trample and grind of the ground swell on the beach. It seemed to her, as I say, she might recover thus her lost youth; and recovering that, might even yet recover her lost love. Colthurst might return to her, return forgetting much that had fallen out but ill of late, forgetting the terrible words he had spoken, forgetting all—as she just now was so willing to forget—save that once, long ago, here in the tender-hearted West country she and he had courted and loved.

This sounds absurd; but the Celt is always absurd, extravagant, impossible. Of them it is written, 'They went forth to the war, but they always fell.' Written truly—romantic, wrong-headed, infinitely pathetic race! And now, at this lowest ebb of her fortunes, the irrepressible Celt arose in Jenny, making her sing a swan-song of longing, of foolish, baseless hope. If she went away from London, went away to the home of her girlhood, she would find her girlhood there, awaiting her.

But the swan-song had died down, somewhat,

during those jolting nine miles out from Yeomouth; died down yet lower as she stood now in the open space before the small, close-shut cottages at Beera Cross, while the carrier's van rattled and bumped away into the distance along the straight, high-banked Roman road. For there was still a good mile to walk, and the night, though warm, was wild; and the westerly wind, though soft as milk, was boisterous. It drove shouting over the bare upland country, broke in great waves against the little huddled houses, roared through the oak, beech and larch woods where it struck them in the windings of the combe. The moon was past the full, a low-hanging, stormy moon, blurred and irregular in outline, and encircled by a great reddish halo; a moon showing fitfully between the floats of dark ragged cloud, that raced up out of the Atlantic across the pallid grey-green sky and across her face.

Jenny had not reckoned with accessories of storm and darkness when she set forth; had not reckoned seriously with the fact that she knew practically nothing of what awaited her at Beera, did not know, indeed, whether her father was yet alive or not. In starting on this wild-goose chase her mind, according to its fatal custom, had overstepped intervening difficulties and grasped merely at the fancied end to be reached. But now alone, save for Dot,—bewildered and sleepy, clinging in most unwonted spirit of dependence close against her,—face to face with the tumult of the night, poor Jenny's swan-song died down, and the intervening difficulties took on large proportions. She dreaded the long walk down the

combe; the van was gone, however, and a shyness possessed her, she could not make up her mind to knock at those closed doors and ask for a night's shelter or even for a lantern, so she turned down the steep lane which seemed to yawn a dark abyss ahead.

Dot hung back. The London-bred child, at home in the streets, fearless before that most alarming of all phenomena to some of us, a human crowd, shrunk from this closeness to nature.

'Oh! I'm awful scared to go down into that ugly old black place, Mammy,' she whispered.

Jenny was half scared herself. But there was no help for it. So she kept tight hold of the child's hand.

'Don't be a silly,' she said. 'There's nothing to harm you. We'm going home.'

And so hugging the left bank for shelter, stumbling in the deep, moist wheel-tracks by the roadside, they struggled on.

At the turn of the combe the little church, nestled in the hillside, rose sharply defined against the gloom of woods beyond. And the grave-stones stood up white and stark, seeming to move, sway, incline towards each other in ghostly confabulation as the cloud shadows rushed over them. Then Jenny, superstitious as she was, became scared in truth. And though her breath was short, her knees weak, she hurried the child on down the hill, gasping, not daring to look behind her. For in the cry and swish of the wind, in the rustle of fallen oak and beech leaves whirling along the road-way beside her, she heard the stifled, pleading voices of the dead—mother, friends of long

ago, a baby sister whom she had lost as little more than a baby herself, poor nameless corpses, too, cast up maimed and disfigured by the ocean along that iron coast—calling to her to come and join them, to lie beside them in their shallow, rock-floored graves. Her pace quickened almost to a run. The swan-song of hope died out completely in her heart; and Dot fell to sobbing, mingling her pitiful little private and personal out-cry with the thousand-tongued lament of the gale in the woods.

Here the road narrows, is more closed in and overhung by trees. A heavy cloud obscured the moon too, making the darkness for some hundred yards profound. And poor Dot sobbed and slipped, slipped and sobbed. She had on a smart little pair of new yellow boots, high-heeled, smooth-soled, a present from Captain Prust, as ill-suited as boots could well be to the alternately rocky and slimy road—for, thanks to the large amount of rain which had fallen of late, springs had broken up right in the middle of it, washing the road-metal bare in places and in others forming long streaks of rusty, iron-stained mud. Fortunately the wind lessened, there was a partial lull, the tumult of sound abated. Jenny walked slower. She felt as though she had a band across her chest that was being drawn ever tighter and tighter till the pain of it amounted to agony, and her mouth filled—she knew the taste only too well—filled with blood.

Just then the moon sailed out from behind the cloud, and spread a tender sorrowful-seeming light over the road, the woods, and the steep hillsides. And immediately on her right, weird, mystic, fairy-

like under that thin, silvery radiance, Jenny saw the rough cart-track buried in large-leaved butter-burr, leading up through the larch plantation to the disused stone-quarry; the gate, the little bridge of slate slabs spanning the stream. It was here she and Colthurst had given and taken their first fatal kiss, and so the spot was dear and dreadful to her both at once.

Still, though she wiped it away again and again, the blood rose in her throat, stained her lips. She had never bled like this before; and a sombre belief settled down on Jenny that at this rate the voices calling from the church-yard would not call long in vain; that not health and recovered girlhood but something very different awaited her in the little white-walled town that weary half-mile below. And the settling down of this belief was very frightful to her. With the giving-out of hope came a giving-out of physical strength. She was too distressed, too disheartened, for the moment, to go further. She crossed the rough bridge, sank down among the lush damp growth of grass and ferns, leaned her poor head against the gate-post. While Dot, throwing her arms about her mother's waist, hiding her face in her lap, cried aloud—partly in panic terror of the storm, the loneliness, the large mystery of the night, partly in childish misery over the soiling and spoiling by mud and wet of her smart, new, yellow boots.

'I wants to go back, Mammy. I wants to go back to the Capt'n and Mrs. Prust,' she wailed. 'It's awful ugly here with nothing but trees and no streets. Why ever don't they light the gas? And I'm ever so

hungry and there's cold creepy-crawlies running up my legs. And the moon's nasty, all crooked like it's got a swelled face. Oh! Mammy, let's go back. I won't never call it poky again if you'll only go back.'

But as the blood rose, hot, acrid, nauseous into her mouth, the conviction deepened in Jenny that she should never go back. Yet it was not so much the fear of death as an immense, profound, all-engulfing regret for the false promises of life which caused her most poignant grief. Pushing the crying child away with an incontrollable movement of impatience, she flung the skirt of her gown up over her face and head, and thus veiled, rocked herself to and fro in the frail moonlight, and wept and wept.

Chapter IV.

On the window-seat in the Rector's study among an orderly confusion of piled up pamphlets, transactions of learned societies in drab and blue covers, and miscellaneous *disjecta membra* of printed matter, Mary Crookenden sat waiting for the post to come in. The Rector's study, though uncompromisingly square, is a pleasant room, lined on three sides with bookshelves from floor to ceiling. Its furnishings are by no means new, but they have a certain friendly comfortableness about them from long use. Mary could remember the room just as it now was, since the early years of her childhood. Neither it or Uncle Kent ever changed. The firelight danced over the big tiger-skin rug and the deep crimson-covered arm-chairs just as

cosily, and Kent Crookenden's steady, kindly eyes met hers just as reassuringly now as when she wore those very short and staring-coloured frocks which had so disturbed Mrs. Crookenden's sense of propriety.

Out of doors the three days' gale was abating at last; but the wind still blew gusty, driving the fine, soft rain past the window in silver-grey scuds. The heart-shaped lawn and carriage-sweep were strewn with leaves, the rusty reds and browns of which offered a sharp contrast to the vivid green of the turf and purple-blue tones of the shingly gravel. The said carriage-sweep is bordered by a thick-set shrubbery of rhododendron under a ring of trees; the upper branches of which, bared by the gale, framed in an irregular oval of grey sky, while between the trunks of them looking away to the front gate past the stables, was a vagueness of hurrying mist.

Nature still quivered, as it seemed, from the recent violence of storm and tempest. The outlook was a melancholy one; but Mary liked it none the less well for that. She felt grateful, indeed, to the Earth-Mother for setting her great symphony in a minor key, and fingering out only low-toned pensive music. For over the girl, likewise, a tempest had passed, from which she still quivered, from which her inward sky was still overcast. The shock of her interview with James Colthurst's former mistress had been profound, had shaken the very foundations of her being. It had wounded her pride; wounded her moral sense; had endangered her trust in herself and in those innate beliefs which had so far ruled her conduct; it

had changed all the values; put a new complexion on much she had learned of late to hold dearest. It had effected nothing less, indeed, than a revolution in her outlook on life. Finally, it had raised a practical question of the very gravest moment; a question which it was impossible to ignore, which she was compelled to answer. Not that her affection for Colthurst was lessened. It remained; its dominion over her was strong as ever. But the quality of it had suffered change. It had lost its brilliancy, lost its fearless delight, above all, had lost its innocence. For during her interview with Jenny Parris she had been forced, willy-nilly, to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and to her sorrow, to her shame—a shame, the bitterness of which no man, I fancy, will ever quite understand or measure—her eyes were opened. She recoiled with the anger, with the fierce disdain, that is a constant quantity in the purity of a noble young girl.

And under the influence of that recoil she too had turned her steps westward. She required to be alone, required to think. Required to adjust her mind to the altered aspect that this bitter increase of knowledge gave to life. Required, above all, to find an answer to that practical question of right and wrong, the answering of which—for she did not permit herself to blink the truth—involved not only her own future, but that of three other persons as well.

The fundamental rectitude of Mary's nature displayed itself rather admirably at this juncture. Cost her what it might, until that question was answered,

she had told herself she would not see James Colthurst again.

Happily Slerracombe House was empty, Mrs. Crookenden and Carrie having gone up to London to welcome the Duckingfields back from their wedding-tour, and assist in inducting them to the large and somewhat funereal mansion they had elected to take in Cromwell Road. So Brattleworthy offered a safe harbour of refuge, as it appeared to our storm-tost maiden, where she might think the sad thoughts born of deepening experience and arrive at right conclusions in peace.

Cyprian Aldham, it is true, was still at Beera, for he had turned back in a sternly ascetic spirit to undiluted clericalism and parochialism on the breaking off of his marriage. The sacerdotal note was the master-note, after all, in Mr. Aldham. But then it appeared probable to Mary that Aldham would dislike meeting her, at least as much as she would dislike meeting him; so that she did not think it necessary to let his neighbourhood deter her from going to Brattleworthy. She wanted quiet, she wanted the support of an unbiassed judgment; and that support, when she had sufficient fortitude to tell her grief and ask for it, she believed, and rightly, she would get from her uncle, the Rector.

The post came in extra late, as it invariably does when one sits at the window wishing and watching. But it came at last, and Mary received her letters.

One from dear faithful Sara Jacobini, that was a matter of course. One with Indian stamps and postmarks. Mary sighed, laid it in her lap unopened.—

What poor Lance had to say would keep; it could not be gay reading, particularly just now. But there was a third letter, to which Mary's fingers clung very tenderly as she handled it, while her eyebrows drew together and her lips grew white.

'How can I reason with you?' Colthurst wrote. 'You have flown off at a tangent. You forget that nothing is really altered in our relation to one another. I am substantially the same person, you substantially the same likewise. The past days are just as sacred, the coming days may be just as sweet as ever we dreamed before you knew this thing. And see, it was always there—there no more, but equally, there no less, now that you know of its existence. It has become not one bit more real, more actual, more potent for evil, by the fact of your having knowledge of it. Therefore, be reasonable, my best beloved. Don't mistake shadow for substance; regard the thing simply—in an unexaggerated light. Do not allow sentiment to warp your judgment.'

If this trenched on sophistry, to Mary it was sophistry of a dangerously coercive sort. For as she read she could hear Colthurst's voice, broken, by emotion, urgent, yet gentle, pleading with her in every sentence. Could feel the strange charm alike of his power and his weakness; the upsetting pathos of the man's tremendous personality combined with his childlike trust and dependence on herself. Ah! it was splendid after all to be loved by James Colthurst.

Instinctively she shifted her position a little, raised her head, her eyes began to dilate, her lips to [illegible] their colour. And as she moved, Lancelot's unopen

letter fetched way, slipped off her lap, lodged in a cleft between the Anthropological Society's reports and the transactions of the British Association for 18—. Mary paid no heed to it; after a minute's pause she read on.

'And see, my darling, at least I have done you no wrong. Long before I met you last summer, I had parted, to all intents and purposes, with Jenny Parris. Years ago she pleased the baser part of me—but, it is a profanation to speak of the affection I once bore her and that which I bear you, on the same page. Women such as you have but one sort of love to give, holy, undefiled, complete. We men, alas, have many sorts of love to give, so you must not judge us by your standard. Nature perhaps, custom and habit certainly, have made us grievously different in this respect. Only understand that whatever quality of love I may have entertained for her is dead long ago. She herself, by her own action, destroyed it. Still I have no desire to go into that, to clear myself at her expense, or to use her offences as a cloak for my own. I will deal justly by her—don't be afraid. She shall not want and her child shall be provided for. But from henceforth she passes out of our lives—yours and mine. I will arrange all that. And yet, though it sounds like a paradox, I am almost thankful she declared herself to you, for now no shadow of concealment is between us. You know, I tried to tell you, but you would not hear. Believe me, if you can forgive the passing distress, that this has happened is best for us both—if you will only be reasonable.'

Mary leaned her head against the window sash, and

gazed out at the wind and wet. It was not easy to resist that pleading voice; while easy enough, in response to its pleading, to be reasonable according to the fashion it enjoined.

'And so by the memory of all our best hours together, by the memory of every promise, every gracious word, every caress—in the name of the redemption you have worked in me, in my thoughts, ambitions, purposes—I implore you to put away the remembrance of this vile thing, in as far as it comes between us, cuts you off from me, keeps us apart. Because, my dearest, if you do not I cannot answer for myself. I used to be pretty well able to face the world alone. I can't do so any longer. Without you the clue is lost, I have nothing to guide me, nothing to steer by. The last three days have been infernal. I dare not write, hardly dare think about them. They have been days of outer darkness. I fancied I knew what torment was, but it seems I did not. This was something new. I have no words for it—it was the abomination of desolation. For a while even Art herself was false to me, turned grotesque; mocked me, drawing aside her garments and showing me that under the goodly seeming of them was nothingness, vacancy, a strong delusion. Mary, no man has ever loved a woman more devoutly than I you. I must have you. By God, I will have you. See, across the distance you have put between us, I stretch out my arms to you. Dear love, you won't have the heart to resist—you will hear, understand the greatness of my need, yield, forget. Already I hold you, see your eyes again, kiss your lips—then all is well.

Short of that, oh, well, short of that—for loving as I love you no less than that, no compromise, is possible—for me there remains only the abomination of desolation. So give way, my dear one—hear me, and forget.'

Shall we condemn Mary Crookenden as light-minded, wanting in strength of purpose, of moral stamina, because, by the time she had finished reading Colthurst's letter, heart had gained over head, because she ceased struggling to discriminate between abstract right and wrong in an all-compelling awareness of her lover's desperate need of her; because, in short, the great god once more conquered, came into possession of his own again? Human nature being what it is, and we ourselves, excellent reader, being after all, you know, but human, had best perhaps be silent, cover our mouth.

Getting up, clasping her hands behind her, the letter in them, she began walking backwards and forwards across the room; first the warm firelight, then, as she turned, the wan, pensive light of the autumn morning alternately touching her figure.

'Yes, I will give way,' she answered, out loud. 'I understand. I will try to forget.'

And then, once having yielded, the longing to relieve his suspense, to shorten the time of his probation, took possession of Mary Crookenden. She went back to the window—if it was not too wet she would go out now quickly, by herself, go up to the post-office in the village, telegraph to him at once.

But though the rain was not heavy, Mary left the window hastily, in consternation, for, walking up the

carriage-drive, his long black mackintosh shiny from the damp, was no less a person than Mr. Aldham himself. And the sight of him, at this particular moment, was particularly jarring to Miss Crookenden. To cross the hall with a view to going upstairs, she must pass the front door, so it appeared safer to stay where she was. Fortunately the Rector was out. But Aldham's near neighbourhood made her extremely nervous, all the same; for it brought keenly before her the most unsatisfactory episode in her experience. On the face of it she had behaved badly to Mr. Aldham, had made a fool of him. He was not precisely the kind of person who relishes being made a fool of; and on parting with her he had permitted himself to tell her quite plainly his opinion of her behaviour. His remarks had been extremely pungent. Mary reddened at the mere recollection of them. The events of the last week had been sad enough, heaven knows, but they at least had been dignified; and there was something very distasteful, displeasing to her in having these other inglorious recollections—not only of Mr. Aldham's speeches, but of all the strife of tongues that had arisen around her broken engagement, and of all that odious business of returning her wedding presents—revived just now. It seemed to vulgarize the present, to cheapen it. Mary stood on the tiger-skin rug, full of resentment, her hands behind her still clasping Colthurst's letter.

In the long run, I suppose, we all really do what we like best; and on that hypothesis, Mr. Aldham unquestionably liked doing what more malleable and less rigidly self-opiniated persons would have voted

highly embarrassing and disagreable. For after a very short delay, the study door was opened and the servant ushered him into the room.

Aldham had preserved the gift of extracting all personal and related meaning from his expression, and presenting himself to you as a chilly abstraction. He might have been meeting Miss Crookenden for the first time. The effect was neither pleasant or reassuring. He bowed on entering the room, came within speaking distance, delivered himself of his business deliberately, with unbending severity of manner.

'I find Mr. Crookenden is out,' he said. 'I therefore thing it best to speak directly to you. This will save time, and in the present case time is of importance. I come in the interests of one of my parishioners.'

Mary inclined her head in acknowledgment of this speech. If he was cold, she at least could be cold too—all the same her cheeks were burning. The position appeared to her singularly ungraceful.

'I was called in early this morning to a woman who, apparently, is dying. She informs me that you are acquainted with her and with her unfortunate career. She is most desirous to see you, as she has something to communicate to you which—so she says—it is impossible for her to mention to any but yourself. She has been away from Beera for many years. She is a daughter, I learn, of the Dissenting lobster-catcher, William Parris.'

Mary could not help herself—it hurt too much—she gave a sort of imploring cry. The severity of Aldham's bearing suffered no dimunition. His lips

were tightly compressed, his light blue eyes as hard as steel. He told himself he was acting rightly, acting as the priest is bound to act, letting no private considerations interfere with the duty he owes to a member of his flock. He told himself he suffered acutely. He did not add that revenge is sweet. It took Mary some moments to recover herself, during that time he waited silent.

'You have alluded to—to this woman's unfortunate career,' the girl said at last, in proud desperation. 'Do you know what it has been?'

'In part, yes,' Aldham answered calmly.

'Then surely you must see, you must understand that I cannot hold any communication with her. To ask me to do so is to insult me, Mr. Aldham.'

The young clergyman's delicate face grew scarlet, but he retained self-possession.

'That, pardon me, is beside the mark,' he replied. 'This unfortunate woman, Jane Parris, is in very poor circumstances, deserted by the person upon whom she has the strongest claim, she is mortally ill. Her case is a lamentable one; and I, as her pastor, am under the obligation, at whatever cost to myself, to do what I can to mitigate her suffering. She entreats to see you, Miss Crookenden; and I own it appears to me, that far from its being impossible you should acceded to her request, she has a peculiar right to your consideration. Since she has expressed the wish, expressed it most earnestly I may add, I do not myself comprehend how you can conscientiously refuse to gratify it.'

Again Aldham waited silently, while in Mary

Crokenden a rather agonizing battle went forward. For it was cruel, cruel, surely, that just now when her whole spirit was molten, so to speak, by the passion of those concluding sentences of Colthurst's letter, she should be called to perform this tremendous act of self-abnegation. She began to walk up and down again, her head bent, her eyes fixed upon the ground, the room very still save for the dragging rustle of her gown, the crackle of the fire, the swish of the rain against the window.

And Aldham, not without an unconscious but very actual satisfaction, watched her, registering the progress of the battle. Depend upon it, the view of human nature which sees in Inquisitors nothing but monsters of brutality and iniquity is an uncommonly crude one. Most acting members of the Holy Office, I fancy, were extremely fine gentlemen whose intellectual and moral sense was exquisitely well-trained.

At length the girl stopped; and Aldham had to own that the stately quality of her beauty had never been more notable than in this moment of humiliation and defeat.

'Please tell Jane Parris she may expect me this afternoon—that is, if it is not inconvenient to you to give her a message,' she said.

'Not in the least. But I should fail in discharging my mission unless I stated that she expresses the greatest anxiety to see you some time before to-day's post goes out.'

Then Mary began to gauge the greatness of the sacrifice that would be demanded of her. She flinched, would have prayed for mercy, perhaps, had

any one but Cyprian Aldham been the bearer of this call upon her courage. As it was she answered him calmly.

'In that case I need not trouble you with any message. I will order the carriage at once, and shall reach Beera sooner than you will.'

She went towards the door, Aldham moved too, opened it, held it open for her. Mary bowed as she passed, but without looking at him. And Aldham told himself once more he had suffered acutely during this conversation.

'But I did right in speaking, in not sparing myself,' he added. 'I did quite right.'

And later that same morning, Mary Crookenden, the purest, most gracious instincts of her womanhood called forth by the irresistible appeal of poverty, sickness, the on-coming of the mystery of death, knelt on the uneven, worm-eaten floor beside Jenny's testerless bed, listened to her husky, gasping speech and answered her very gently.

'I thought on the grapes and the glass of water,' Jenny said, 'I knew you were like that, when you heard how bad I was you'd come. There's not many of your sort as ud do it, but I reckoned you would, because of that glass of water.'

'Yes,' Mary murmured, soothingly; 'yes.'

'Dying's a poor enough tale, anyway,' Jenny went on; 'but it's most past bearing, when you have to go all alone, with the curse on you of the one you've loved best. I know I ought to set my thoughts on the Lord, and so I do. But somehow your heart turns back, spite of you. And Jim's very strong—nothing

don't frighten you much when he's by. You know all about that.'

'Yes,' Mary Crookenden murmured again. 'Ah, yes.'

'Poor, dear soul,' Jenny gasped. 'It's pretty rough on you, too. But you'll make him forgive me? You'll let me see him again, for certain?'

And once more Mary assented. Then Jenny raised herself a little, spoke with tremulous haste.

'Only you'll make him understand he's bound to come on the quiet, when father's out to sea, because he's mad against Jim for the scandal he holds he's brought on the place along of me. Aunt Sarah Jane is always tellin' what he says he'll do to him if he ever shows his face in Beera town.'

Jenny sank back upon her poor pillows.

'And God knows, I'd rather go unforgiven, sooner go without ever setting eyes on him again, though it 'ud be awful hard, than that any harm should overtake him.'

Jenny smiled a little to herself.

'Jim's too good to waste,' she said.

But that smile touched the limit of Mary's power of endurance. For this woman's unconquerable pride in, unconquerable belief in James Colthurst—a pride and belief rivalling her own, yet divided from it by so frightfully different a past—was positively staggering to her reason. That roads, distinct as those leading upward to paradise, down into the abyss, should reach precisely the same end;—that she—she, Mary Crookenden, proudly clean in mind and body—that she and this poor dying prostitute

should share the same longing, the same faith, the same devotion—should find their deepest joy, their deepest sorrow in love of the same man—was too bewildering a revelation of equality, of the brotherhood which, despite all our placings of higher and lower, still binds human beings together with bonds stronger than class or creed, stronger than vice and virtue, strong as life and death itself. Mary felt she must go, escape, must be by herself, silent, alone, with the sad sweet music of the great Earth-Mother out in the wind and the wet, or she would have no power left to face what remained yet to be done of this strange day's work.

She rose from her knees, but the sick woman perceiving her intention, caught feebly at a fold of her dress.

'You'm coming to see me again?' she gasped. 'The others is always on about Jim and his wickedness till I'm fairly mazed with their clack. You'm the only one as know, as comprehend. And then you're very good to look at, like the sun, shining and lighting up this poor place. God bless you; I never thought to live to say that.'

And so Colthurst's letter was answered. Not telling him his love would return; not bidding him seek his love. But bidding him hasten, put aside work, put aside anger and vengeance, forget past injuries, past offences, journey down to Beera Mills and comfort Jenny Parris as she lay on her death-bed.

Chapter V.

The last of the tan-sailed herring-boats had rounded the pier-head and sailed out into the wide bosom of the Bay, and the night—tranquil, mild, starlit—had closed down upon the woods and sea and the little white-walled town, when the Rector and James Colthurst crossed the silent Square and went up the steps leading on to the narrow, cobble-paved platform before William Parris's cottage at the edge of the cliff. The rush of the stream in the gulley answered the beat of the surf on the beach as it had done any night there many hundred years. The air was still, sound carried. Now and again the voices of the fishermen, calling to one another as they shot the herring-nets, came from far across the great plain of water, weird in effect, wild as the cry of beings of another age and race.

Colthurst heard them with the same vividness of apprehension with which he heard and saw everything to-night. His senses were preternaturally acute; were flayed, so to speak, offering a surface all quick to the lightest touch. He divined, moreover, with a kind of naked distinctness, what passed in the minds of those about him. For him the veils were withdrawn, the merciful veils which blunt perception and so help to keep us sane. To all those who are really alive, saint, sage, artist alike, each on their several lines, this condition is common at moments. It may be enchanting. It may be hideous. Perilous it must always be; for it oversteps the workable limits of human powers. In it the spirit breaks

bounds, ceases to be conditioned, gets quite too close to the essence of things for personal safety. And so, in desperation, if it be a spirit finely-tempered and of noble quality, is driven to take refuge in the prayer, in which fortitude and sanity grapple an immense terror of ruin and eternal failure—the prayer 'let me not be confounded.'

And now as Colthurst stood before the old, red-cob cottage overlooking the sleeping village, fatalist though he was, that prayer rose to his lips. For the place was thick with memories, and memories are precious bad company. If evil memories, wholly bad. If sweet memories, bad company still; since what they speak of is gone and lost to us, useful only for the further furnishing of that House of Regrets, for which in youth we bake the bricks, of which in manhood we build the walls, wherein, in old age, we live. And so Colthurst paused a little, to steady himself and fight down the fear of confusion that haunted him, glancing in that rapid, quietly violent way of his, at the great dark V of the hillsides meeting in the bottom of the gulley immediately below—at the vast pallid expanse of the sea—at the overarching dome of sky, a shade darker than the sea, a shade lighter than the land, a web of fine mist drawn across it tempering the radiance of innumerable stars. Lastly he glanced at the light in the cottage window, just above him, up under the thatch.

Inside the cottage, awaiting him were realities more searching, after all, than any memories. Colthurst walked on to the far end of the platform, guarded by a broken paling, and looked down on to the beach

some fifty feet beneath. He must give himself a trifle more time; he could not trust himself to meet those realities just yet.

For the light in the window symbolized that which had marred his career, crossed his high ambitions, drained away his strength like a running sore all these last eleven years. He had struggled against it, concealed it, defied the pain of it; made himself a name, a position, something approaching a fortune even, in spite of it. For the James Colthurst of to-day and the James Colthurst who had sat on the sea wall there below eleven years back were two very different men. Yet the symbol remained a true one, representing a constant quantity in his thought, a constant impediment to his freedom of action. And now the last scene of the long tragedy the symbol stood for was to be played out; to be played out, complicated by the—to him—profoundly ironical fact, that the honour and delight of his life had turned advocate for the disgrace of his life—Mary Crookenden turned advocate for Jenny Parris.

And as he stood looking down at the dimly seen beach thinking of all this, trying to overcome the bitterness it raised in him, he recalled, somehow, with singular distinctness that old boyish dream of his—of falling, falling everlastingly through space from off the edge of Saturn's luminous ring; recalled the strange hallucination which had overtaken him, here, the night of Jenny's birthday party—the day he first saw Mary Crookenden; recalled the high staircase window of the Connop School, the asphalt pavement, the chirping, impudently observant sparrows.

And then the dark boulder-strewn beach seemed to call aloud to him, above the boom of its slow breaking waves and the grate of its pebbles, of rest and of emancipation—to call not as tempting him, but as promising that endurance should not fail or go unrewarded. And somehow that grim promise was very grateful to Colthurst. Sent him back to Kent Crookenden—who waited a few paces off digging the point of his walking-stick into the mould between the upstanding cobbles—braced and steadied. Let the realities be what they might he dared meet them, since behind them all, be they never so confounding, he caught sight of the form of the great deliverer, the great peace-maker, the friend to be counted on, who never fails any one of us—Death, 'delicate death.'

'I am quite ready now, Mr. Crookenden,' he said. 'Let us go in.'

The gloomy cottage kitchen, long and low as the cabin of a vessel. A heavy, fusty odour of lumber, old nets, disused lobster-pots, the accumulated dust and rubbish of many years of none too dainty housekeeping. Miss Crookenden's mulatto nurse, her swarthy profile and gay-coloured turban-like cap catching the light as she bent down tending the fire. Then the little cramped, turning staircase—the steps of it crumbling from dry-rot—which creaked complainingly beneath Colthurst's rapid tread. The open stair-head where Bill Parris slept, divided from the inner room by a thin wooden partition.—Dot slept there to-night, and the child started and turned in her sleep as he passed her.—The wooden partition is cut off straight along the top, leaving a vacant

space of some two feet in the middle under the ridge beam of the roof. The door has no lintel to it, and its big wooden latch is lifted by a knotted string from without. Colthurst, alas, had lifted that latch before now; knew the passing resistance it offered when swelled, as to-night, by recent damp; knew the groan of the rusty hinges, as with its yielding the door swung back.

And then the room within.—For an instant all reeling together, every object in it ringed round by half the colours of the prism, then straightening back into place again, and presenting a picture of every smallest accessory of which he was vividly sensible.—The downward sweep of the raftered roof to the low side walls from off which the paper peeled in mouldy strips. The uncurtained window, directly before him in the triangle of the gable. On the right the large low bed with its unsightly sawn-off posts at the four corners. And to-night over and around that bed, and thrown up on to the raftered roof by the candle set on the sea-chest under the window, women's shadows, shifting, crossing one another, oddly deformed and distorted. And Colthurst, in his present condition of clairvoyance, forced to see those women with unsparing clearness of vision, to comprehend the relation of each to her companions, and, still worse, her relation to himself—to comprehend it in the full breadth of its incongruity, in its glaring divergence from the ordinary lines of social intercourse, in the dislocating moral problems it involved.

First—because of least consequence—Mrs. Kingdon, William Parris's sister, mother of Jenny's old

sweetheart. Colthurst remembered her perfectly, had never liked her, did not like her now. A decent, dismal person, with a worried forehead and eyes at once sly and devout. A person of many trials richly enjoyed. She was engaged—Colthurst knew it, and it irritated him exquisitely—in enjoying the present trial to the uttermost, as she sat by the bedside, in black gown and all-round linen apron, with her little air of conscious forgiveness of many injuries received, wiping the moisture from Jenny's forehead or her parted lips.

Then Jenny herself—lying half over on her right side, the form of her body from shoulder to foot plainly outlined beneath the thin bed-clothes and old patch-work quilt. Her hair drawn away from her face and the nape of her neck, in a dark tangled mass, across the crumpled pillow. Her breath coming irregularly in panting, weasing sobs. Jenny—he knew that, too—stronger here on her sick bed to affect his future, nullify his dearest hopes, than she had ever been in health. And if Jenny dying was thus strong, what might not be the strength of Jenny dead? Only by a tremendous exercise of will could Colthurst check his thought, hold under his imagination, refuse to look ahead. But he checked it, held it under; for very sufficient to the present hour was the evil thereof.

And lastly, seen as across some wide blank space, inaccessible, far removed, Mary Crookenden, a strange inmate of this poverty-stricken place. Her back was towards the candle as she stook by Mrs. Kingdon, shaking out the folds of a clean, soft towel.

And to Colthurst it seemed that a sort of greyness covered her, making her figure much less positive and tangible, than the crooked shadow thrown up on to the raftered roof. And as he came forward to the foot of the bed he saw her eyes close, saw her lay hold of the top of the sawn-off bed-post, knew that for the moment she suffered actual physical pain.—Ah! these realities were much worse than memories, no doubt about that.—And seeing, knowing all this, he sickened with an agony of remorse for the bitterness of the experience which his love of her, her love of him, was bringing her. His letter of three days ago appeared to him an enormity of egotism. He ought to have accepted her first recoil from him, after learning the fact of Jenny and Dot's existence. The subsequent appeal he had made to her was weak, unworthy, hysterical. Truly loving her, he ought to have let her go once and for all, go while the freshness of disgust and anger were upon her, and so saved her this present grief. It was not Jenny lying there dying whom he hated now, not Jenny whose doings were unforgiveable, but his own. And Colthurst hated himself, hated himself with an absorbing blackness of hatred for the way in which—as it seemed to him—he had dragged this beautiful woman down to his own low level; doing, in his unpardonable selfishness, the very thing which but a few months back he had scorned to contemplate—scorching not her feet only, but, as he feared, the very soul of her in the flames of his private hell.

Then indeed he did come very near being confounded. For even death, unless death meant ex-

tinction, offered, so he thought, but doubtful refuge; since while consciousness remained, it seemed to him the face of Mary Crookenden, as he saw it now with the greyness of sorrow upon it, must continue that of which he remained supremely abidingly conscious, on and on, for ever.

But the great god Love—dear Love—though we rail at him, and rightly—for the many evils he brings on our sad human race, has still his wholly excellent aspect, his wholly divine side. He is the father of many falls, of much weeping; but he is also the father of the most gracious deeds man's history, written and unwritten, has to show.

The creak of the crazy stairs under Colthurst's tread, the suck of the lifting latch, momentary oblivion of the truth during which her spirit had leapt up instinctively to greet him, were cruel to Mary Crookenden as the first incision of the surgeon's knife cutting down into the quivering, shrinking flesh. But now as Colthurst looked full at her, an anguish of humiliation in his eyes, Mary lost sense of her own pain in the depth of her realization of his. By the quickened insight Love gives, comprehended and, in as far as might be, answered that prayer of his against being confounded; met his eyes fearlessly, with a certain stately courage; even dared smile, gravely sweet. She spoke too, simply and to the point; trying in fine self-abnegation to turn the current of his thoughts away from herself, towards the practical matter of Jenny's piteous state.

'You are here just in time,' she said, quietly. 'We were almost afraid you might be too late. There has

been another attack of hemorrhage, and it has left her very weak. But she will rally, I think. She will know you; only we must spare her any shock. We had better stay till she moves before we tell her you have come.'

And thereupon Mrs. Kingdon, a little jealous of her sick-room supremacy, elected to intervene, bringing down sentiment with a run, as you may say, from the heights of somewhat extensive tragedy to the lowlands of dismal, domestic snugness. For Mrs. Kingdon was one of those oddly-constituted persons—they are to be found in every West Country village—who revel in personally conducting a death. They have the ritual of the ceremony at their fingers' ends. Charon himself might take lessons from them as to the most professional fashion of handling the oar while ferrying departing souls across the dark river. But from one cause and another Mrs. Kingdon found the proper ritual vexatiously difficult to carry out in the present case. Miss Crookenden, notwithstanding her gentleness, impressed her not a little. What was the reason of her interesting herself so much in Bill's poor, discreditable daughter? For the life of her she could not make out. Her conscience, further, was extremely uneasy, although her vanity was extremely flattered, at being party to this secret visit of the common enemy, James Colthurst. What would Beera Town say when it came to know? Mrs. Kingdon had a general sense of being unevenly yoked with unbelievers, of having, possibly, permitted herself to be made a cat's-paw of by Satan himself. She sighed loudly and repeatedly, regarding Colthurst, mean-

while, obliquely out of the corner of her eyes; and being a person of principle, struggled to be true to her own small system, notwithstanding inherent difficulties, and to conduct her niece out of this world according to established precedent.

'I question if she will rally, Miss Crookenden,' she said, in a tone of complaint. 'And if I was so as to follow my own sense as to it, I should rouse her up a bit. For we'm bound to own there's signs of the end in plenty, and I hold it's wicked to let any one—whatever they be—slip off without knowing they'm going.'

'I think she knows how ill she is just as well, probably better, than we do,' Mary answered.

Mrs. Kingdon sighed again, clasping her hands together upon her apron in the depression between her knees, and swaying herself to and fro from the waist.

'The heart's deceitful above all things,' she observed; 'an' desperately wicked, and Jenny's given them she belongs to a sight of trouble pretty near ever since she was born; and it 'ud be just of a piece with the rest if she was to slip off unawares without telling if she's turned to the Lord.—And her poor dear father out to sea with Steve too, and not a creature to be able to tell mun whether his only daughter's made her peace or not before she went.'

She debated inwardly how much further it might be safe to venture along the road of accredited ritual; for, though her appreciation of the feelings of others was comfortably circumscribed, Colthurst as he stood there at right angles to her, had an effect of still violence about him which made him appear a rather

unknown and alarming being to invite to assist in the customary ceremonies of decease. All the more praiseworthy on her part, then, the effort to make him do his duty!

'If I was in your place, sir, I wouldn't reckon too much on any rallying,' she said. 'I'd bring it home to her as she was goin' for sure, and ask her about her state.'

In his present attitude of mind this suggestion struck Colthurst as almost devilishly ironical.

'W-would you, Mrs. Kingdon?' he stammered. 'Your niece has known me in a good many characters before now, I r-regret to say; but in that of father confessor she would hardly recognize me, I'm afraid. Sudden expressions of anxiety on my part, as to the state of her soul, m-might even seem to have an element of farce in them—h-here in this room—she lying on that bed.'

But, indeed, there was no need to rouse Jenny, for at the sound of his rapid whispering speech, she moved, straightened herself, and doing so caught sight of him. And her face, pinched and disfigured by sharp physical distress, softened, lighted up, grew young. By a strong effort she raised herself on both elbows, while her hair fell dark about her shoulders; and she laughed, actually laughed from joy at seeing him, laughed out. Then would have spoken—welcomed, thanked, praised, blessed him in her old hopelessly-hopeful fashion; but a term is set to laughter as to all else, and for Jenny that term was already fully reached. For her, the days of laughter were spent and over; and so, rightly under-

stood, this last laugh was but another added to the long list of her irremediable mistakes. It sent the blood welling up from her lacerated lungs, flowing down from her poor laughing mouth over the bosom of her nightgown on to the sheet.

'Lord a' mercy—'tis the end for certain sure,' Mrs. Kingdon cried.

And Mary Crookenden cried out, too. She could not prevent herself, the sight was too heart-rending. Then, compelled by a very storm of pity, murmuring incoherent words of comfort such as one murmurs over a child that is hurt, she bent over Jenny trying to sop it up with the towel and hide this horror of blood.

But Colthurst took the towel from her, put her at once fiercely yet tenderly aside. For that Mary Crookenden's person, or, indeed, the hem of her garment, should come to be stained by that red tide, seemed to him the culminating grossness, indignity, disgrace, of the relation of these two women to himself.

'N-no,' he stammered, 'no, you can't, you mustn't d-do that. It passes the limits. It is my b-business, Mary, mine only—not yours.'

And then, while Mrs. Kingdon laid Jenny back upon the pillows, Colthurst, taking the bit of sponge and the little, cracked, brownish-white pudding basin of tepid water from off the chair by the head of the bed, knelt down beside her. Set his teeth hard, and in that deft, unerring fashion of his, washed her lips, chin, and throat, turned back the neck of her

night-dress in front to hide that ugly soil, helped to administer such remedies as were to be had.

And for a while Mary Crookenden watched, but she could not watch for very long. Her eyebrows drew together, and the chill pride came back into her bearing. Pity gave place to an irresistible uprush of personal feeling, even of class feeling. The natural woman in Mary was affected by jealousy and resentment; the fine lady in her by social prejudice, by dainty disdain. For it was almost intolerable to her to see Colthurst minister thus to his former mistress; to see the hands she loved and in the consummate skill of which she gloried—the hands that had painted famous pictures—the hands whose touch had wakened in her knowledge of the splendour of living for those who dare sing the 'Song of the Open Road' —to see these hands busied in repulsive, menial, sick-room offices, holding a little cracked pudding basin, wringing out a bloody sponge. The girl turned away with a lift of her fair head and a rustle of silk-lined skirts over the uneven floor, pushed the small casement window wider open, looked out, deeply stirred, deeply angered, into the mild autumn night. For at Colthurst she dared not look any longer, lest feeling should master self-control, lest she should call out to him haughtily and command him to stop. And as she breathed the sweet night-air, heard the babble of the stream in the gulley, the roar of the slow breaking waves and the hiss of the surf on the beach, Mary repented for the moment, of her own self-abnegation. Why had she yielded to the sick woman's entreaty, why had she bidden him come? To her it appeared

that she had been guilty of the folly of being righteous over much.

And Colthurst noted her every movement; read, plainly, as though it was set down in very big print, what she felt; knew that the crisis he had warded off so many times, the decision which he had so often eluded, was upon him, relentless, absolutely unavoidable at last. With Mary's change of attitude Colthurst's had, in a measure, changed also. He no longer feared being confounded, no longer was aware of self-abasement. The pace was growing too hot for all that. He could not reflect, he could only act. And on his action during the next couple of hours—for the bleeding had nearly ceased, the end would not be yet—depended all his future. He foresaw that action must determine, irrevocably for this life, to which he belonged, which woman conquered, won, owned him—Jenny Parris, his fellow-sinner, his comrade of evil days, peasant, model, harlot—or Mary Crookenden, beautiful, spotlessly pure, rich too in the good things of this world, the woman whom he supremely honoured and loved.

Colthurst set his teeth harder; but he finished squeezing out the sponge, arranging the neck of the night-gown, folding under the stained corner of the sheet, before he rose and went back to his former station at the foot of the bed.

And Jenny, meanwhile, was unconscious of the drama being played out around her. For though the hemorrhage ceased, the bitterness of death had come upon her, following hard on that last laugh; and even when death wears a friendly aspect, that bitter-

ness is often very great. For the soul could not easily free itself from that shapely, well-fashioned body of hers. It struggled to get loose, but the flesh held it back; and Jenny groped with her hands on the bed-clothes, her eyes staring half open as at some sight of unearthly terror,—a rattling now and again in her throat, too, between the panting, choking breaths.

The last sound was new to Mary Crookenden; and it was very ghastly. She began to listen for it; and each time it came she sickened and shuddered. She lost her count of time, as she listened; minutes seemed lengthened into hours; and that dreadful sound seemed to grow louder at each recurrence, louder than the rush of the stream, louder than the beat of the sea on the rocky beach. At length she could bear it no longer. She turned round, met Colthurst's eyes for an instant, looked away from him to the bed, came forward across the narrow space; and hearing that sound, seeing, in the flickering candle-light, those groping, searching, clutching fingers, cried, half imperiously, half imploringly, to Sarah Jane Kingdon:—

'Ah! do something, do something to help her. It is cruel, heartless, to stand by seeing her misery and doing nothing to lessen it.'

'My dear Miss, she's past help from such as us,' the elder woman answered, in the tone of one very wrongfully accused. ''Tis the Almighty's ruling some should die hard, and it's not for us to question but what all's according to mercy. I've seen worse passings than this, so that's not what makes me fret.

What troubles me is she's not spoke up and told if she reckons she's made her peace.'

Mrs. Kingdon shook her head and sighed heavily. Unevenly yoked with unbelievers or not, she was resolved to bear testimony, to uphold disregarded ritual.

'We'm bound to take all that's laid upon us,' she continued. 'But 'tis no end terrifying to the mourners when they don't know if they'm free to think comforting thoughts of them they've lost. And her poor, dear father out to sea and all.'

She concluded with a reproachful, sidelong glance in the direction of Colthurst.

But to the pious woman's strictures he was, just then, quite indifferent, for Mary, after momentarily watching those sadly groping fingers again, turned to him, her lips trembling with emotion, an agony of sorrow, of relenting, of unstinted compassion in her face. She put up her hands, pressed them against her chest to keep down the dry sobs which almost stifled her.

'Then you must do something,' she said, her grave voice all broken. 'You must help her, comfort her—oh! you must—it's so dreadful to leave her all alone with her suffering like this. And I—I won't see—I won't look—I'll turn my back.'

And so the crisis was upon James Colthurst; the choice placed right there before him, immediate, final. And he knew that it was a real choice. He was free to take either one and reject the other, nothing compelling him thereto but his own will. The balance

hung even. He was free to throw the weight into either scale, as he pleased, that should make it dip.

For that piteous appeal of Mary Crookenden's, the childlike simplicity of the phrases in which she couched it, proved to him beyond all question that her love was intact still. Still she was his in heart. The cruel experiences of the last week had not really alienated her. Still all his dearest, highest hopes might be fulfilled, still he might have her as bride and wife.—The thing was as easy—well, as easy as lying. He had only to repudiate Jenny's moral claim on him, now at the eleventh hour, when he had so immensely much to gain, she but the doubtfulest measure of good to lose by such repudiation. He had only to echo Mrs. Kingdon's statement and declare her beyond the reach of human help.—And after all —for Colthurst reasoned the matter out with his usual singular clear-headedness in presence of a searching situation—what positive assurance had he that she was not actually beyond the reach of such help? How could he be certain that now, *in extremis*, the mists of death confusing every sense, the hands of death slowly, painfully, yet surely drawing apart and disentangling soul from body, Jenny remained capable of receiving consolation from any degree of tenderness, either of word or caress, which he—Colthurst—might lavish upon her? Might not his labour be all in vain Was it not little short of insane to contemplate bartering the joy of fruitful, honourable years stretching ahead, against this very questionable chance of succouring, solacing, easing the last hours of unruly, impossible Jenny Parris?

And then he put the case to himself from Mary Crookenden's standpoint. He perceived that she was sadly wrought upon, tired, her calm courage nearly or quite exhausted. What right had he to try her further, expose her to more of this wretchedness? If duties were about, wasn't it a plain enough duty to take her away from this miserable scene, and place her—where of right she belonged—far from these sordid, incongruous circumstances? To-morrow Colthurst could trust his own clever, stammering tongue and the greatness of his love, to do all that was necessary—to soften remembrance of the events of to-night and appease any inconvenient workings of her conscience. He entertained small doubt but that he could plead his own cause so as to secure the mildest of verdicts.

Yes—still, if he pleased, Mary Crookenden was his. And knowing that, he looked at her now, standing tall and fair under the ridge-beam of the raftered roof in the centre of the old-tumble-down, comfortless cottage bed-chamber, looked at her from head to foot, letting his glance rest on every graceful line, every gracious detail, drown itself in her tearful eyes, linger upon her lips—until passion waxed hot and his dark face flushed, while her actual surroundings seemed to him to fade, to be blotted out, and her figure to stand before him, naked, in all its maidenly loveliness, white as a pearl against a sheet of white flame.

For the moment Colthurst's brain reeled. The emotional side of his nature had full sway. He was reckless, mad, drunk. Then—since thanks to per-

sistent effort, persistent struggle, spirit in the man during these twelve months had steadily gained over matter—then suddenly a great shame covered him. For it was not, surely, according to this gross pattern his love for Mary Crookenden had been conceived, brought forth, reached maturity? Appetite, so far, had never got the better of chivalrous reverence even in a glance, hardly—and that is saying a very great deal, if said truthfully—hardly in a thought, since the opening day of term at the Connop School, when he had first found her name upon the students' list.

Colthurst put his hands over his eyes to shut out the vision, bowed his head.

A silence, broken only by the laboured breathing of the dying woman. By the sanctimonious sighings of Mrs. Sarah Jane Kingdon. And—in singular contrast to these last—the solemn voice of the sea lamenting along the coast; but lamenting as brave souls alone know how to lament for the mysterious sorrow that lies at the roots of being—acquiescent, without admixture of any sentimental self-pity, sternly faithful in the fulfilment of their appointed work.

And that solemn voice brought good counsel. When Colthurst looked up he was sane. He had laid hold of the meaning of those tremendous sayings concerning the plucking out of the right eye, the cutting off of the right hand and the right foot; and having laid hold of it, had made his choice—convinced that choice was best not only for himself but for the woman he worshipped—had determined absolutely into which scale to drop the weight.

'Very well,' he said, quietly, 'so b-be it. I will help her, that is, in as far as I can. B-but a man cannot serve two m-masters.'

He paused, for his stammer threatened to become ungovernable.

'Therefore farewell,' he went on, 'farewell, Mary, my b-beloved.—And now go, in God's name, my dearest, go. For to have you waiting and watching here while I do and say what must pain, must almost insult you, what must desecrate, what may render abhorrent to you the thought of the love you have given me—t-that would be too much.—G-go, while you can still pardon me for all the evil with which through me you have become acquainted; while you can still pardon the immensity of my self-seeking in approaching you, asking you to marry me, asking you to let me mingle the foul stream of my life with the clear stream of yours. Asking you—for, God forgive me,' Colthurst broke out fiercely, 'as I see it all now it comes to nothing less than that, asking you to pay for my adoration by becoming, under the specious title of wife, the last, choicest, most precious, most costly offering I can make to my own desire.'

So far he had looked down at the uneven, worm-eaten boards while he spoke; now he raised his eyes to the girl's face.

'D-don't misunderstand me,' he said quickly. 'I don't want to discredit marriage to you and make you think slightingly of it. To the pure all things are pure. And there are men as well as women to whom marriage is pure, honourable, altogether wholesome and cleanly.—He glanced away at the low wide

bed.—'B-but I am not among them. And therefore to me it would be the last refinement of self-indulgence.'

He paused a moment, and then looked at Mary Crookenden once more, with a serenity which had a certain grandeur in it.

'And so go, my beloved,' he said very gently—'go, knowing that if souls can be saved you have done much to save mine—that if there is, as Christ preached, a life beyond this wherein man is at rest, rid for ever of the curse and burden, the fret and torment of sex, then you have done much to win that life for me by your love and your suffering. And so go, knowing that you have brought me nothing but good. Go, before I do anything further to pain you, before your love, as well as my poor discarded mistress, Jenny Parris, comes nearer lying dead.'

Colthurst moved forward, would have passed her, going round to the side of the bed. But Mary stopped him. She could not speak. But she put her hands on his shoulders, drew him towards her, kissed him on the mouth,—a kiss of renunciation, yet of faith, of strong encouragement and help. Then she let her arms drop at her sides, and with her face set like a flint, turned and went.

'Fay, who ever heard and saw the like of that?' Mrs. Kingdon gasped, greatly scandalized, under her breath.

Colthurst walked straight on to the head of the bed. Sat down sideways against the sawn-off post, his back somewhat bent to avoid the low sweep of the raftered roof. He put his arms round Jenny, raised

her softly, carefully, till her head rested on his shoulder where Mary's hand had rested but a few seconds ago.

'Jenny,' he stammered, 'Jenny, poor, loyal soul, come back, and whether you've made your p-peace in higher quarters or not, at least let me make my peace with you before we too part.'

Chapter VI.

Only in myth and legend do rods turn into roses. In everyday life they sternly and persistently, alas! remain rods. So it certainly appeared to Colthurst, as he leaned on the rickety paling, guarding the cobble-paved platform before William Parris' cottage, in the chill of the autumn morning, and looked across Yeomouth Bay, to where, behind the swelling uplands of the distant moor, the dawn grew and spread—primrose, saffron, scarlet, crossed by long wisps of smoke-coloured cloud, fine as a woman's hair. Over the leaden grey plain of water the herring-fleet slowly fared homeward; all save one boat, which, some half-hour ahead of the rest, was already taking up its moorings within the shelter of the sickle-shaped pier.

Mary Crookenden had gone from him. Gone, as we know, with a kiss sacred and sweet; and with her going Colthurst's gracious vision of wedded-love had fled back through the gate of dreams from whence at first it came. And Jenny Parris had gone too. Gone with a blessing, which went far to cancel the

old bad score. Gone along the shadowy, silent way which leads, so some tell us, to a land where the most lovely of dreams—with a difference—come true. And now he waited till Mrs. Kingdon should have dressed Dot, and packed the child's scanty wardrobe, and made her ready to start home with him to London, the gas, and glitter, and smoke, and stir of which she loved.

Colthurst's will was firm. His choice had been reasoned, voluntary, deliberate, final. He accepted the consequences of it unreservedly. But it would be absurd to pretend that he felt very elate. Rods were not changed to roses; and the saying that virtue is its own reward, rightly understood, is a hard saying, not without an element of cynicism in it. No great wonder, therefore, that the future looked somewhat purposeless to him, neutral-tinted, dull and leaden as the sea spread out before him, whose furrowed surface the fair colours of the dawn as yet failed to touch. For it is no joke, depend upon it, for any child of Adam honestly, and in serious earnest, to turn monk. To extirpate 'the eternal feminine' and all that term stands to cover—its pretty minor joys and tender distresses, its merriment, its charming follies, its delightful fertility in small solacements, its inspiring revelations of unselfishness and high courage; as well as its violences, vanities, cruelties, numberless seductions, numberless delusions, unblushing lies and lusts. And yet, as Colthurst perceived—perceived with the same unsparing clearness of vision which had pursued him all that night—for a nature like his, half measures were intellectually and morally impos-

sible. *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien;* and to rid himself of the evil it was necessary for him also to cast away the good.

What, then, practically was left to live for? An idea and a fact. Art on the one hand, Dot on the other.

About the first he felt easy enough. For Art, as he reasoned, like Religion—like all the greatest ideas vouchsafed to us—lives by sacrifice, draws her vitality from the life-blood of her votaries. To secure her fulness of being and of splendour you can hardly—within the limits of sanity—sacrifice too much. She cares not a rush about the domestic happiness or maternal prosperity of those who devote themselves to her service. Rather does she drive them out into the wilderness, far from the common haunts of common, householding, money-making, uxorious, philoprogenitive man; and there reveal her secrets in solitude, thirst, and hunger, amid bare rock and burning sand. And so,telling himself this, as to coming pictures, Colthurst's mind was at rest. The extirpation of the eternal feminine, he fancied, would rather help than hinder alike their production and their intrinsic worth.

And on the other hand Dot.—Ah! Dot presented something of a problem, for Colthurst held himself to be a strange sort of nursing mother for a very clever and rather naughty small girl. He permitted himself no sentimental, Sunday-school book illusions regarding the child and his relation to her. He foresaw collisions, embarrassments, practical difficulties

in profusion. But they did not affect him much. Colthurst, in his present humour, accepted these consequences of his choice along with the rest.

'If I can only hold out,' he said to himself as he watched the widening dawn and the nearing herring-boats. 'That's all which really signifies. The truth is sad, incomparably sad. I always knew that. And to go on loving it, not flinching from it for all its sadness through years—I am in brutally good health now, so the years will probably be many—well, it will be a tough enough piece of work. Yet it is worth while,' he added. 'I'm sure I don't know why—but that it is worth while, I don't doubt. And so the one thing which signifies is to be able to hold out, decently, without whimpering or shirking, or making a show of one's sores, until death comes, at last, to close the account.'

Just then the rim of the sun's disc cleared the swelling uplands of the distant moors, sending widening rays of light flashing up to the zenith, changing the smoke-coloured cloud to flame, making a path of glory across the waters of the Bay. A glad morning wind arose, and rushed down the valley from landward. And along with the wind, so it seemed to Colthurst, a Presence, at once benign and awful, swept by him, making the frail paling quiver under his hand, and the harsh grasses and withered sea-pinks rooted in the cliff side whisper and shudder oddly as it passed.

Instinctively he turned to look up at the window of the bed-chamber where Jenny's corpse lay, the window in the gable up under the thatch. And turn-

ing, found Jenny's father, William Parris, within a couple of yards of him—a savage yet majestic figure, in his rough fishing clothes, his blue eyes wild, the salt rime frosting his beard and snarling mouth.

'Who be you?' he cried. 'What be doin' here?' —Then, in obedience to the fixed idea which possessed him, he broke out inconsequently:—

'Woe to the fulish virgins, woe to the rebellious daughters, and to them what leads mun captive wi' lying words.'

'Woe enough,' Colthurst thought, 'God knows.'

But when he tried to answer, to quiet the man, to tell him that with Jenny, at all events, it was well, since, forgiving and forgiven, she had entered into rest, once again Colthurst's tongue played him false. He was very tired. He stammered, stammered badly, could not articulate a single intelligible sentence. Stood dumb, in all the pathos of utter incapacity either of explanation or self-justification, as far as speech went—his eloquence useless, his repentance, his sacrifice, his expiation doomed to silence, since his body thus in his extremity had turned traitor to his brain.

Exactly what took place, neither Stephen Kingdon, who followed close behind, nor Kent Crookenden, who was coming up the steps from the Square—having returned from taking his niece home to Brattleworthy—can say. Whether the old man, maddened by Colthurst's silence, actually struck him, or whether Colthurst, not choosing to defend himself, backing away from his assailant, backed too far, Steve Kingdon does not know. But he knows this, that as

he ran up and caught Bill Parris round the shoulders and hauled him off, the crazy paling cracked, gave—splintering right and left like so much matchwood, and Colthurst pitched right back over the cliff edge. For an instant his face caught the sunlight, as his body turned in the air; while with a great shout—which rang along the coast, and out across the tranquil Bay, and over the sleeping, white-walled town, and up into the windings of the wooded combe—a shout of triumph, of consummated warfare, of emancipation, of hope—that strong soul hailed Death,—the consoler, the restorer, 'delicate Death'—sitting waiting for him just this side the white line of the slow-breaking waves on the purple-grey shingle fifty feet below.

And that is why they dug two graves within the week, side by side, in the little churchyard half-way up the combe; and why they flew the flags, down in Beera village, half-mast high.

Epilogue.

It is given to few to realize their ideals—to the few, not to the many. All the more soothing and refreshing, then, to let thought dwell awhile upon the happy state of those favoured few.

And to begin with, the Council of the Connop Trust School may claim to stand among those consolatory few. For it the days of doubt and misgiving, of sitting on the edges of official chairs, are over. It made much handsome mention of the great services

rendered to the school by its late director, James Colthurst. Inserted the said mention, not without rhetorical flourishes, in the 'minutes' of its meeting; and promptly proceeded to fill the vacant post with a very safe, very innocuous, and very-much-married gentleman of conservative views and middle age. Realism and subversive tendencies have vanished from the Connop School. And Mr. Barwell has vanished also—has retired finally and permanently to the semi-detached villa and society of the gentle parrot-nosed sisters at Hampstead. Not that the incoming director wished to eject the under-master. He would gladly have retained his services. But no, Mr. Barwell could not stay—having held office under King Stork, he could not make up his mind to hold office under any King Log again. It was foolish of the good man. The work would have been light; under the new *regime* he might have drum-doodled along in the easiest possible fashion. But the spectacle of Colthurst's tremendous vitality had fascinated him; and to him the Connop School, without that spectacle, was a little too melancholy. He could not stand it.

And next, among the consolatory few, we may number that extremely pretty little person, sometime Violet Winterbotham. For several winters now, both at the Hunt Ball at Slowby and the Bachelors' Ball at Tullingworth, she has appeared dazzling, dimpling, most decorative of dormice, in all the Aldham family diamonds. The year after his nephew's engagement came to such a very lame conclusion, Sir Reginald, still inconsolable for his wife's death and in lively search of consolation, happened to meet the Winter-

bothams at Homburg. Lady Sokeington, *nee* Barking, says she can't conceive how any girl can quite make up her mind to marry a man three times as old as herself. But adds that—'darling Vi always was wonderfully sensible, and that it is too delightful for words to have her settled just next door, as you may say, in Midlandshire; and that the son and heir is quite the trottiest of trots. And, of course, young Mr. Crookenden was really more than slow and tiresome about his affair. Ana then, after all, his father was only a Bristol shopkeeper—merchant?—oh, well it's very much the same thing, after all—though his mother is tidily connected; so clearly this marriage is infinitely the nicer of the two. And dear Sir Reginald is more than off his head about her; Vi is quite *the* love of his life, one can see that. And then there *is* something very touching about being an old man's darling; and if Vi doesn't mind the disparity, why really nobody else need worry about it, at least that it what she, Lady Sokeington, thinks.'

And little Dot may be reckoned among the consolatory few, also, for she seems to be in a fair way to attain her ideal. She danced, not at the Slowby Hunt Ball last Christmas in diamonds, like young Lady Aldham, but at the Covent Garden pantomime, in the most delightfully abbreviated of skirts and the gayest of tinsel, which regarded from a certain level is every bit as useful and meritorious a proceeding. She wore wings, actually wings like a butterfly's, with great gilt-paper eyes on them. It was enchanting, heavenly. And Mr. Snell, of Shepherd's Bush, made himself a positive nuisance by the vigour of his

applause in the topmost gallery. Other and more influential persons than the enthusiastic Snell remarked the little girl's performance also, with consequences, for it was evident the child, small and light-made as she is, has real talent. And so, although—as Mrs. Prust loses no opportunity of informing all whom it may or may not concern—'there is no need for the poor little mortal to work for her living, because even if she hadn't a little something of her own, which she has, she—the speaker—and Capt'n Prust have plenty enough to provide for her,' it is probable Dot will dance her way through the world; and that her name, before long, will come to figure in play-bills, and her quaint, shrewd, able, little face in photographers' windows and the pages of dramatic journals. Let no one be alarmed. Mrs. Prust will prove a capable guardian of her morals; and neither Dot's heart or head are of the same quality as her mother's. She is not of the sort who make shipwreck. She is too clever; shall we add she is not sufficiently generous-natured? For, though possibly the admission is a dangerous one in some of its aspects, it does undeniably take a rather superb generosity to throw yourself away according to the superabundantly reckless fashion of poor Jenny Parris.

And mention of photographic studios suggests further thought of Cyprian Aldham. For that gentleman's delicate, fine-featured countenance is conspicuous just now in the large window in the Strand, from behind the plate glass of which—set in little rows, both clothed in the full canonicals of their respective professions—celebrated comedians and cele-

brated ecclesiastics look forth side by side, with a millennial harmony that, as one fancies, might prove rather startling to the fathers of the Early Church. Mr. Aldham, after some years of really admirable London mission work, has been offered—so the *Guardian* announces—and has accepted the newly-created Indian bishopric of Munipur and Gowhatty. No doubt he will do laudable service there to the Anglican Communion. As to the future of Cyprian Aldham likewise, no fears need be entertained.

But how about the goodly youth Lance; is he fated to realize his ideal or not? That is precisely what Mrs. Crookenden would be so extremely obliged if any one would tell her. She still regards her niece Mary from the point of view of disapproval. But her disapproval runs on quite other lines than the old; for it is the young lady's constancy rather than her tendency towards new and surprising departures which now so greatly vexes her aunt. Is Lancelot to be kept waiting for ever? Mrs. Crookenden asks.

And Lancelot himself cannot answer that question. He only knows he cannot change. How on earth can you change when you have felt just the same ever since you can remember? And therefore perhaps—though Polly is so awfully good and kind to him and seems so willing to have him on hand to look after her and do her odd jobs, that he can't help sometimes being a little encouraged about it all—perhaps it would be wiser to make up his mind that he will always have to wait. This was what he told Lady Calmady when last he talked the matter over with her, walking up and down the broad southern ter-

race at Brockhurst, which overlooks the sloping paddocks where the dainty-limbed yearling fillies feed, the stately avenues of elm and lime, and the dark ridges of the fir forest. Lady Calmady spoke comfortably to him, smiling at him with her delightful smile—for she and her husband have a very true fondness for the goodly youth—telling him to wait yet a while longer and then take heart of grace.

And Mary? She has disappeared from the smart world, and from the world of art as well, for the last few years. Vague rumours of her come from distant quarters. Evershed and his wife caught a glimpse of her at Cairo. And about fifteen months later, Horatio Deland, the Thought-Reader—who is making a tour of the world to collect perfectly reliable information for that new and very illuminating association known as the S. R. E. S. O .I.—in a letter to Adolphus Carr, mentioned that he was almost certain it was she whom he met in the gateway of a temple at Tokio, one day in early summer, when the fruit-trees were all in bloom. Kent Crookenden has been travelling with her. He put in a *locum tenens* at Brattleworthy—a diligent, praiseworthy young cleric, who, it may be mentioned in passing, calls increasingly often at Slerracombe House, furnished with an increasing amount of interesting parochial business, the detail of which he finds it increasingly necessary to discuss with that best of good-hearted young women, Carrie.

Madame Jacobini remains in the little blue house in St. George's Road. For, as she said to Kent Crookenden:—

'I really am too old to live in my boxes, and be on view and equal to the situation, morning, noon, and night. A woman who respects herself and other people's eyes will go into retirement for a large number of hours out of every twenty-four, if she is wise, when the grand climacteric has come within sight. Travelling brings out all the weak spots in one's looks, manners, and temper. No, thank you, the tax on one's own vanity and one's neighbours' forbearance is too severe. And, moreover, Mary will be just as well away from me. We women are invariably too intimate when we care for each other. We relax each other's tongues, under the plea of communion and sympathy, and encourage each other to say a thousand and one things that had better be left unsaid.'

Madame Jacobini made a small grimace. Her tears were rather near the surface somehow.

'We enervate each other abominably,' she went on. 'Carry the dear child off, and keep her from me till the wound has healed a little—poor darling.'

And so, troubled by a spirit of rather cruel unrest, our proud milk-white maiden wandered away, as so many another before her has wandered, trying to cheat sorrow by change of place. Wandered through the magic East, mother of religions, mother of countless millions of human worshippers. Wandered on to tropic islands lying like jewels on the bosom of the summer sea. And on again till East turns West, and ancient civilizations gave place to civilizations that count fewer years than the others count centuries. From Asia, ripe to rottenness, to America, crude often to commonness; yet rich with the promise of

the days to some, as the former is rich with the splendour of days that are past. While more than once during her wanderings, the turn of a sentence suddenly heard, the tone of a voice, a rapid gesture, a figure momentarily caught sight of on railway station, or steamer-deck, in crowded eastern bazaar or equally crowded western street, has made the girl's heart stand still, and the blood leave her lips, with the ache of longing for what has been and is not. And then the unrest, which might have seemed for a space in abeyance, has seized her again, bidding her wander further, further yet, on her pilgrimage after a lost good. For that is the worst of the wages of sin. Sinners cannot pay them all—however willing, however passionately desirous even they may be to do so. Those wages are always paid in part, of necessity must be, by the innocent in place of the guilty.

But, at last, in that New World, where we of the Old World fancy hope has her dwelling—but in a part of it touched by the pathos of payment, on a very large scale, of certain wages of sin—it came about that Mary Crookenden, in obedience to a simple and, on the surface of it, very inadequate cause, began at last to overget her spirit of unrest.

It happened thus. Lancelot—rather incited thereto by Lady Calmady, I believe—joined the travellers in New York. And while there the fancy took Miss Crookenden to journey down south and visit her mother's home. An unknown uncle and aunt—bachelor and spinster—still live in a portion of the large, wide-verandahed mansion, with quaint mixture of straitened means and stately etiquette. And there,

one day, waiting under the magnolias before the house, for Lancelot and one of the negro servants to bring round the horses for her early ride Mary, moved by a sudden impulse, said to the Rector, as he stood by her holding her whip while she fastened her gloves:—

'Tell me, Uncle Kent, what does one end by doing when all the best is taken away from one, when life has grown trivial, stunted, and narrow; when the sun of one's happiness is set?'

And Kent Crookenden mused a little, letting his kindly eyes rest first on the great half-ruinous house, and then on the girl's face, white as the opening magnolia blossoms above her head.

'After a time, Polly, not at once—that would be asking too much of poor human nature—but after a time, my dear, one lights a candle called Patience, and guides one's footsteps by that.'

'Do you speak out of your own experience?' Mary asked, gravely.

'Yes,' he said.

And then he rehearsed to her the story of a courtship which had gone forward, in this very Coudert Mansion, over thirty years ago.

'To the best of my ability I lighted that candle the day your mother told me which of the two brothers who loved her she loved best. It burnt very badly at first, Polly, did my candle—guttered, had thieves in the wick; and meanwhile I stumbled pretty freely. But, by God's grace, it has burnt brighter as time has gone by—burns brightly enough now, as I hum-

bly trust, to light me down the long hill of old age without any very discreditable tumbles.'

'Ah, dear Uncle Kent,' Mary exclaimed, softly..

The Rector felt for the black ribbon, and drew the little faded miniature out from its hiding-place.

'There is my romance,' he said. 'This is like her, but you are more like. And so you are very dear to me for sake's sake, as well as for your own. Try to light your candle of Patience, my Polly, in faith; remembering that you are not alone. More than half the noblest men and women you meet carry such candles likewise.—Ah! here come Lancelot and the horses.—Steady—are you all right? Wait a moment, let me put your habit straight. Don't go too far and tire yourself.—Take good care of her. Lance.'

THE END.